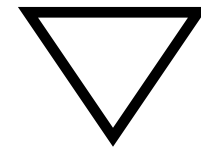


IN/VISIBILITY: PERSPECTIVES ON QUEER UTILITY, PASSING, AND DRAWING BLURRY LINES



VOLUME 1

mere existence constitutes a more vigorous threat to heteronormativity than my own. True, I am sometimes offered a conditional seat at the table. But this seat is truly a conditional one and taking it means submitting to a veil that obscures essential (you can read that as *crucial* or *inherent* – take your pick) aspects of myself and, while it may bring safety in passing, fails to bring with it a community where I feel accepted, included, represented, or aligned. So if I make a habit of calling this bluff and throwing up a middle finger in the face of this conditionality, why do I feel pushed back into that corner by my fellow queers? Are we not aligned around the act of spitting back in the face of those who seek to hold us hostage?

*

There is an implicit command in all of this. The command is: *prove it*. If you say you’re queer, then prove it. As I write this, I feel obligated to catalog every moment in my life in which my queerness has reared its head, to call witnesses to the stand and furnish hard evidence. But this begs two questions: how does one prove they are queer, and, why the fuck should I have to?

When does my queerness collapse around you? What is the moment you begin to hold it in doubt? Was it the first penis? The most recent one? Is it my long hair? Do I wear too many dresses? Should I get a fanny pack? Is it because I clipped my carabiner to my bag and not my belt loop? Did I fail to meet my queer quota? How much queer sex do I have to have to absolved of these sins? Where do I apply for someone who will watch and keep tally? Who is keeping count of this shit?

And *what makes a person queer*? Is it the presence of queer desire? The absence of straight desire? Is queer an adjective that exclusively describes desire & sexuality? What is queer culture? Is a queer still a queer if they haven’t ever had sex? Is a queer still a queer if they are celibate? Is queer still a queer if they’re single? What makes queer sex queer? Is it the body parts? Is it what’s absent? Is it who we fuck, or how we fuck them? Or why we fuck each other?



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that contribute to a hostile environment for non-normativity at worst or uphold the ever-visibility of this typicality at best, or, I can actively practice creating space for more visible non-normativity and centering the experiences of people more marginalized and targeted than myself.

And also: while it may be less materially dangerous, it is not negligible that it hurts when what is actually passing is read and treated as not belonging at all. I believe that there is space to hold both of these truths at once. I realize that this dialogue falls perilously close to demanding more space for folks who may already be swimming in it. I realize also that when we, the straight passing queers who feel tender about it, talk about this we often sound defensive. This is because we have something that we feel we need to defend – queer authenticity. These aren't easy lines to toe: it's not clearly evident how to talk this through without appearing to center identity politics over urgent material realities. But it doesn't feel satisfactory to me to say that in an effort to center the most marginalized voices within the queer community, we can't or shouldn't talk about this phenomenon – the bi- & panphobia & erasure among us or how that affects our alliance against cisheteronormativity and struggle for queer liberation – at all.

Rereading what has been written so far of this essay, I am struck by the realization that, evidently, having my queer identity questioned feels like punishment for having sex with men. My feelings around this are wrapped up in my lived experience as a person with chronic illness, in the misogyny and sex shaming I already experience elsewhere, in the ways my non-normativity does actually exclude me from truly accessing heteronormativity – even if it is possible to trick them into having me for lunch, so long as I hold them at a long enough arm's length. Conveniently for me, in the chaos of my body's adrenal agenda, my long bones didn't get the message to stop growing at the right time, so I have long arms that suit this purpose.

The push back I feel to my form of queerness makes it harder to find and sustain queer partnerships and can make me feel distant from everyone, relegated to that liminal space where no one will have me. How do I say, "I see the differences in our experiences and that the danger you face is different from my own. Will you acknowledge that you see me as we stand together in our alliance to destroy what ultimately destroys us both – albeit with differing ferocity?" How do I write an essay that lays these vulnerable feelings bare without detracting from current violences that need urgent attention? I hope the fine line between the two is thick enough to at least see.

Words like queer, for me, serve a purpose: they put a name to a lived experience so it can be talked about, and this in turn allows community, bonds, and alliances to be built around those experiences that are shared. It seems obvious to me that under a term as broad and nebulous as queer there will be variation and so not all of the experiences this encapsulates will be universally held in common. I guess this is what queerness ultimately means to me: that some parts of who I am and how I live somehow threaten the doctrine of heteronormativity. I choose this word, threaten, intentionally; this is, to me, the difference between queer and LGBT. True, I can look under the queer umbrella and find people whose

recall the difference between what a friend of mine describes as negative androgyny and additive androgyny – negative being the intended removal of gender markers, additive being the piling on of allegedly conflicting ones.) The issue at hand is about *both* practice and presentation; butch women who may spend years away from queer sex, whether by abstinence, bad luck, or because they too date men are readily recognized as ‘more queer’ than their femme counterparts – by other queers. I’m not talking about whether or not we are seen by the straight masses. I’m asking why the same practices read differently to you, my queer friends, across different presentations.

*

But here’s the other way my chronic illness factors in: when I take my medication, my sex drive almost disappears. When I don’t take it, it’s out of control. The difference is staggering. Why does this matter? My body is so often uninspired to have sex with anyone, be they man, woman, genderqueer, or myself, that when the desire comes I try to take advantage of it while it’s there. What would it be like to want, emotionally, cognitively, to connect with another human in this way – to wrap warm bodies around each other, to frolic and delight in sensation, to play at being bodies – but to live in a body that often won’t play along? What would it be like to be surprised by visiting desire one day, at a time when someone who this would also excite is conveniently near? What would it be like to welcome this gift and to revel in it, and then to hear your friends, your community members, your comrades chastise you for it? To be told that you can’t have both of these things – you can’t name your sexuality *and* express it?

Even the queer community has failed to yet break down the arbitrary focus put on partnership. As long as you are pouring more of your time, energy, and resources (emotional and otherwise) into the people you fuck, fucking will always be a materially consequential activity, an act that refraining from (generally or entirely, whether by choice, orientation, illness, disability, trauma history, or otherwise) precludes certain support networks.

*

I would never think to deny for a moment that there is a difference in how I walk through the world as queer and how someone who is marked – who is constantly seen regardless of their desire to be so – by this identity does. This difference in visibility brings with it differences in how we each experience privilege and oppression, belonging and alienation. It makes sense that there are times when my role is to take a seat, when my role is to perk my ears and listen, when my role is to help lift experiences that are shoved farther down into the dark than my own so that they may be brought into the light. My understanding of this, to be sure, informs how I partner with straight, cis-men when I do, both publicly and privately. It informs how and when I choose to talk about these relationships, how and when I display affection. I am not in need of convincing that this is one of the responsibilities that befalls me as someone who looks the way I do: I can choose to practice and brandish the normative-reading aspects of my sexuality and gender in ways

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- BACK COVER BY CONRAZÓN_CORAZÓN

to negate or set aside a large part of our identity, and also seriously what radical queer universally categorizes heterosexual relationships as “safe” for women?)

*

My experience of this whole thing is wrapped up in my chronic illness – my adrenal glands are broken. For the non-anatomy-nerds in the room – I’ll try to keep this short – the adrenal glands are small organs that sit on top of your kidneys and regulate mineralcorticoids, glucocorticoids, and sex steroids (aka various hormones). My body is chronically under-producing one particular hormone that would ordinarily inhibit another particular hormone, the end result of which would be this whole steroidogenesis process being kept in check. But instead, on my body’s venture to make enough of the hormone cortisol, it ends up making a mess of the rest of the process.

My body, were it not for medication, makes way more androgens (aka ““male sex hormones””) and far less estrogen (aka a ““female sex hormone””) than most bodies that are assigned female at birth. This causes a variety of changes in my body that range from ones you can probably imagine to others – like insomnia – that may be harder to guess. This is a chronic condition that I was born with that, gender stuff aside, has a whole host of consequences in my day to day life and requires daily medication to manage – forever. Because it is a hormonal issue, the standard medical practice for managing this is to prescribe hormone replacement. I take synthetic estrogen and an androgen blocker every day forevermore. This is, actually, the same medication regimen that trans-feminine people take if they decide to use hormones in transition.

Imagine this: my body, on it’s own, looks one particular way – muscular, angled, sharp, flat-chested. When I take my medication for my chronic illness, my body looks another way: the fat redistributes, everything gets softer, fuller, more feminized. This is medically required. That means that, regardless of my gender identity, a hormonal transition in the opposite direction would never be an option for me. I am eternally on MtF hormones as a person AFAB. Can you see how this fucks with my gender identity? But also imagine this: I walk into a doctor’s office and ask for estrogen, ask for androgen blockers, and they give them to me that day. No questions. Just the prescription. You want ‘em? You got ‘em. What does it mean to have such textbook cis-privilege with a non-cisnormative experience of gender and my body?

In those moments when it feels like a reach to call myself woman, I have few options for how I want to reconcile that with my medically feminized body. So I want more body hair, a more angular frame. I want my periods to stop. I want my sex drive back. I want my chest to be flatter. I can’t have those things – this is the body I live in, forever.

When you read my presentation as femme, remember this: there are forces at work beyond my control that instigate my body to signal this to you. Sure, I could bind or wear baggier clothes or cut my hair. But there are tools available to some and denied to me that could help a person with my fashion sense express androgyny. (Now would be a good time to

ones on an unending number of unremarkable occasions ever since).

*

Alternate title two: *how many men is too many men?* Or, how many not-men is enough?

It is not lost on me that we have returned to a point where I am in danger of being ostracized for sleeping with too many men. Does this sound familiar to anyone else?

At the risk of pointing out something terribly obvious, allow me to remind everyone that straight men who do not have the foresight to feel threatened by queer sex are in incredibly abundant supply in every part of the globe. You can't throw a rock without hitting one, and this makes finding them to date, fuck, or fall in love with a less difficult task than if they happened to be in short supply. Queer women, on the other hand, are a rarer breed. Even rarer still is the queer woman who will not feel somehow antagonized by a current or former relationship with a straight, cis-dude. This means that, strictly mathematically speaking, it is much more likely that queer women of the bi- or pan-sexual variety will find hetcis men that they deem suitable (enough) to partner with than land in a queer(er) relationship (or bed). This reality, in turn, pads our dating history with cis-normative cocks, which, in turn, morphs into an even bigger turn off for some queers, leading to an even smaller dating pool outside of the Realm of Cis Dudes. This is a self-replicating cycle that exacerbates itself until we find ourselves at the point of needing to write this zine.

And I get it; there are a variety of reasons that sound acceptable for not wanting to date or fuck women who also do these things with cismen. It's true, for example, that STI rates are lower among people with vulvas who exclusively have sex with other people with vulvas. (Luckily for us, modern technology has provided a number of options for navigating this, including STI and HIV testing and a variety of barriers that can be employed to protect against the spread of infection. Luckily also for us, human sexuality is a vast playground and there are many ways to play, including a number of fun activities that can bring great amounts of pleasure while posing very little or even no risk for transmission of any STI.) I've also heard people talk about the fact that women who arrive to dating another woman after dating a string of dudes often come bearing baggage left behind by these men: baggage associated with patriarchal relationship dynamics, not being listened to, not being respected, and especially all of these things manifesting during sex. I get that maybe it feels easier to date someone who has had the luck to somehow have found primarily caring, thoughtful, respectful partners who listen and inquire and are kind and not sexually self centered. (And also we know that these same problematic dynamics can and do show up in lesbian partnerships, that even if dating men increases the likelihood that you end up kind of twisted, many of us end up kind of twisted anyhow since no one learns how to be nice in public school sex-ed.) I get, too, that being so confronted by a relationship that receives more privilege and structural validation than your own may feel abrasive and uncomfortable, that if you are a person who dates exclusively queer, it can hit too close to home to date someone who has the option to retreat into the safety of something else. (And also, there are aspects of those "retreat" relationships that don't feel safe, that require us

EDITOR'S NOTE & INTRODUCTION

BY KATY CLARK

This zine was born out of my own frustrations: out of dates gone awry, beers soured by casual conversations on the subject, feelings always looming but never really properly addressed. I have a personal stake in this conversation, after all: I am a queer woman who easily passes for straight, whether on my own or when with a male/male passing partner.

The first time I remember thinking clearly about these themes was when a summer visit to the queer communities of Tennessee intersected in time with a non-monogamous, long term relationship I had with a straight, cis-male partner. It was quickly obvious that it wouldn't be appropriate to bring him along to Ida, so I did what a good queer does and left the live-in boyfriend at home, arrived on queer land as a group of queers only. But it wasn't a clean and simple task. There was something else to navigate: how to talk, or if to talk at all, about that relationship. I realized that referring to a partner as 'he' while being read as a woman brought my queerness into question. There would be no talk about my gender identity (or about my partner's), no questions about if I was seeing other people.

I had a more complicated version of this experience not long after, when I was dating a trans man. When we met he identified and lived in the world as a woman, but soon into the safety of our relationship this shifted and he began transitioning and using a different name and set of pronouns. Again I was in a situation where I could talk casually about who I was dating literally anywhere: with my classmates at school, with my coworkers at work, with my grandma at dinner and nobody would bat an eye. I would say 'he' and there would be, again, no questions. But, should I bring him with me into those spaces – to a school event, to a work function, to that dinner with my grandma – that veil would fall away. The questions would come. But give the T some time to kick in and settle down, and even that would change again.

This raised other questions: *what makes a relationship queer?* Is it a queer relationship if our gender identities are something other than cis man and cis woman? What if one person's gender identity changes partway through a queer relationship – is the relationship still queer then? Does calling a relationship between a cis woman and a trans man 'queer' fail to see and validate his gender identity? Is it the fact that our genitals are shaped the same that makes it a queer relationship? Isn't this part of the point of the term 'queer' – to acknowledge the complexity of experiences surrounding identity as par for the course so that we don't have to ask these reductive questions?

This would come up again and again. When I moved to Barcelona, I was excited to live somewhere so full of queers I hadn't met yet. I connected with a lovely lady named Anna over how much we hate men, and at a flamenco show in El Raval she informed me that I

could prevent them from seeing my OkCupid profile by checking the “I don’t want to see or be seen by straight people” box. When I complained that this would hide some profiles of people I might want to interact with, she was surprised and the displeasure was palpable. Her discomfort with my sexuality was a turn off for both of us; we ended up good friends, ignoring it enough to connect over our many shared interests, until one day we were having some beers on the beach with a mutual friend who wanted to gossip about a man I had been seeing. This was the first time I had talked about having sex with men in front of Anna, and she couldn’t contain her reaction upon hearing about it.

This trend can manifest in multiple ways: it can be other queers questioning my queer identity. It can be me, as described above, shifting how I present myself to the queer community. It rears its head when other queer women refrain from involving themselves with someone whose dating history is too saturated with penises, while at the same time employing the pejorative “thirsty” to describe anyone who is making a concerted effort to steer their sex life in another direction. This phenomenon lead to significant confusion when I found another queer housemate on Craigslist, who was then completely mystified when I had men over to fuck.

Most recently, in my life, it came up at the Pride after party, when a friend gossiped with me over beers about his disapproval of the organizers of the event for being queer identified, femme women who have recently dated a string of men. In scenarios like this one, it is easy for me to read a micro-aggressive subtext where I am not the intended subject of the conversation but feel implicated nonetheless. Often when this happens, the person speaking will throw in an, “Oh, I’m not talking about you.” But in some ways they are talking about me, whether they see that or not, and it’s not a fun position to be in, to have someone you feel close to in some capacity telling you to your face that you’re not queer enough while not even having the gall to be direct about it.

I got tired of dancing around this topic and feeling what has ranged from bummed or excluded to actively angry. I wanted to better understand where my friends are coming from when they rant in ways that feel destructive to me, and to also have my own perspective heard and recognized. That so many people have such loaded feelings about this indicates that it’s a subject that needs more attention. Many people I reached out to for contributions to the zine declined to participate, saying that it touched on something too raw and vulnerable for them to consider it. The feelings we are all experiencing are calling to us, pointing something out. So I tried my best to turn those feelings into questions, and to put those questions out into the world to be answered by folks on all different sides of this sticky situation. What are the deeper needs underlying this issue that are being threatened or going unaddressed?

I asked queers abound to reflect on our own queer identities and what the term means to us when we use it and when others claim it. I asked us to reflect on our queer communities and what we look for or need from each other. I asked how our queer identities intersect with our other ones, and how we reconcile these different parts of ourselves. I asked about dissonance between self-perception and how we are perceived by others, about where we

SINCE WE’RE TALKING ABOUT PRIVILEGE, LET’S TALK ABOUT BEING AN EDITOR // FIRST WORD, LAST WORD

BY KATY CLARK

I like sucking dick. I love the feeling of an engorged, erect cock between my lips; indulge in sucking gently on wrinkly scrotal skin; enjoy finding the frenulum with the tip of my tongue. I like teasing the person who inhabits the body attached to the cock: bringing them through slippery suggestions and deep envelopment, always inching closer to ecstasy. I am delighted by what is so often surprise when the orgasm arrives, people who thought they couldn’t or don’t usually come this way giving into the body. I like sucking silicone dick, too, but it is different. No one who has sucked both can look me in the eyes and tell me it’s the same. It is a different experience in all five of the senses.

This essay could be titled, instead, with many questions. One of these questions is: *why would I deny myself this pleasure?* But this essay isn’t about me sucking dick, as much as some people’s attitude would have me believe they think it should be.

*

I came out to my parents as bisexual at the nascent age of 12. It didn’t take me long into life to realize that there wasn’t a way I could be exclusively attracted to people whose parents thought they were boys, and so I used the language that was available to me to clarify this. I didn’t yet know that despite however my own understanding of my sexual orientation evolved, it would be routinely reduced to this first chosen label. I distinctly remember the first time I heard the term pansexual and how it echoed in my head in the days thereafter. I was 14 and working at a midwestern grocery chain. The Backstreet Boys’ As Long As You Love Me came on the radio and I was overwhelmed for the first time with identity confusion – I had thought I was bisexual, but was I actually open to intimacy with people of all identities and gender experiences? (As an aside, I can’t explain quite how embarrassing it is that the lyrical ‘prowess’ of the *Backstreet Boys*, of all bands, nearly moved me to tears in a *grocery store* while I was wearing a *button down denim uniform* and thinking about the queerest identity term I had available to me yet.) As a 16 year old, I traveled to the pacific northwest to visit the campus of the liberal arts college I was thinking of attending. It was here, in the context of queer anarchism and zines, that I was first exposed to the term I have since used, without hesitation, to encapsulate my own identity. I Came Out with capital letters three notable times to get there (coming out with lowercase

passing as a feminine woman who is...

Devin: *[Getting drunk at this point, pestering Leah a bit. Everyone has been talking over each other for at least half of this interview; this has been hard to transcribe. Amber has to power through a lot during this bit. Sorry, Amber, the lone, sober, woman who is about to mic drop.]*

Amber: What I want to talk about, though it’s largely important to contextualize this with my privilege as straight passing, is an aspect of my experience that isn’t discussed: though I have a strong sex drive and want to be having sex all the time, and want to be partnered, I have enough political, gender, and sexual dysphoria with the people I’m generally attracted to – so I just don’t go there. My dating pool is very small because I read as an acceptably passing straight woman that is potentially desirable to straight men. Even if I were to be attracted to some of [the straights], it often doesn’t fit with my conception of gender, sexual orientation, or desire fully. I have a high libido and low chances to have sex that I want. I don’t know people who are presenting fairly feminine, but also are pretty masculine, and have my type of identity.

Devin: Tauruses.

Amber: You say taurus, but I don’t know. I’m not gonna say, “It’s hard out here, you guys,” because I accept it at the end of the day. But queer liberation for me would be “all of this makes sense,” where none of it makes sense to me currently. I have people that I trust, I have friends, I’m rarely partnered with people, and that’s fine.

locate alliances and distinction within the broad umbrella of the term. I asked about how and why we choose who to date, fuck, and partner with, how these questions connect to themes of gender identity, androgyny, biphobia, femmephobia, scarcity, privilege, violence, abandonment, solidarity, and visibility.

Queer, like many identity terms, is a word we have come to use to serve a certain function. We don’t throw these words around if they are useless; we latch onto them for the utility they offer us. So, *what is the utility of a queer identity?* What purpose does a queer identity serve? My impression, as the oft topic of these sorts of conversations, is that some people feel that some aspect of the utility a queer identity provides them is threatened or endangered when individuals who have selective access to heteronormativity claim the word. Remember that these identities are often carved out as harsh juxtapositions. Where straight is the norm, lesbian, gay, and bisexual are claimed as counter-positionalities. These words say: we are not that, we are something else. We wouldn’t have had to name it if you hadn’t named normality, but here we are. And queer we are. So if lesbian, gay, and bisexual are answers to presumed heterosexuality, to what is queer a counter positionality? What if we all have different ideas about what queer means and what purpose it serves? What if you find yourself straddling this already murky boundary?

As this zine reveals, the semantic battle to define the limits of a word intended to be nebulous in the first place point to deeper-seated conflicts. In the ensuing essays, Leah Buck interrogates the origin of her own biphobia, Lily peels back the layers of shame and fear surrounding her identity, Devin Leatherman breaks down the functions his queer identity plays in his life and examines closely when and why he feels ambivalent to give all queer identities the same seat at the table, Ambrose Mary takes a closer look at why she sometimes ends up dating straight dudes, Hannah Carl ruminates on the ways passing and feeling seen influence her own experience of her sexuality, Emily Berry sends a message to her fellow queers, Bethany Anne lays out the consequences of her erasure, Kim Daley traces her journey from a religious upbringing to coming to find a home in queerness, Leah M. asks if queer is what we are or what we do and reflects on how she encounters cishet masculinity as a butch woman, and I put words to the feelings that prompted me to compile this zine in the first place. Alongside these essays, the text message threads constructed by qmp reveal some of the myths and assumptions that surround this topic and Persephone’s comic explores how other identities intersect with queer persecution or erasure. Interviews and conversations transcribed and printed here lend an extra dimension in the form of dialogue: J PGA’s interview reveals how ableism in the queer community can often trump the question of visibility in determining what queer spaces she quite literally can access. Anna, mentioned above, discusses why she chose not to write an essay for this zine in our ensuing conversation reprinted here with her permission. Debbie Pumarada and Devin delve deeper into how racial identity intersects with queerness and what it means to live on the margins of the categories we use to find community; in this same conversation we uncover new questions about how libido and asexuality fit into this dialogue. Ursula’s interview traces a changing landscape of harassment through childhood and transition and examines how this informs her choice of identifier. Amber Fellows, Leah M., and Devin unpack the origins of a queer identity and

look at how it is being distorted in contemporary discourse.

I can't finish out this introduction without giving a nod to the compilation zine, *Queer Enough: Queer Identities, Different Gender Relationships*. That zine, published out of Canada in two installments and then again as a compilation, asks and answers similar questions. There is one major difference, however, between what *Queer Enough* has done and what this zine strives to do: contributors to *Queer Enough* were primarily bi/pansexual people who occupy the anxious space the title opens up. This zine seeks to include the voices of both those who feel their queer identities are being called into question and those who are interrogating them.

Queer Enough struggled with what language to use to describe their zine: the first publication was subtitled *Queer Identities, Different Sex Relationships* – something that changed for the ensuing printings. I am unsatisfied by both of these offered wordings. First of all, sex is a mostly arbitrary categorization that fails almost entirely to be specific or useful to us here. Furthermore, the sex or gender of the people implicated in a relationship don't actually appear to be all that relevant; what matters, then, is the issue of *in/visibility* and all this carries with it: harassment, privilege, recognition, inclusion, discrimination, violence. A relationship can consist of two individuals of different assigned sexes or genders, and still read unequivocally as visibly queer, thus opening the participants up to discrimination and harassment while offering them the recognition and acknowledgment that comes with being seen. A relationship can also, on the other hand, consist of individuals of the same assigned sex or gender, and read as a straight relationship or include appeals to heteronormativity, thus providing the participants some degree of privilege as they fly under the radar while at the same time isolating them from other queers who may not see them.

It is my hope that this collection of works can serve as both a stand-alone dialogue and a starting place for new conversations. I have published here every submission I received and have made no edits for content or perspective. Needless to say, I do not publish these pieces because I agree with all of them; I publish them so that they may be read in context to each other and so that we can listen in attempt to hear the truth in whatever it is that rubs us the wrong way. It is worth noting that, in keeping with the localized impetus for this zine, the common thread that weaves together the contributors is me: I asked them all to write for it. What started as a project to encourage more constructive conversations in my immediate community has unlocked bigger questions that we can all only answer together. So wherever you are reading this zine, consider this an invitation: lend your voice to Volume 2?

Thank you to everyone who contributed and helped make this zine possible, especially Devin for conducting interviews, Lily for transcribing, Debbie for helping locate the right words for the title, Iguana for answering my endless InDesign questions, and Persephone, Mary R, and Hannah for printing.

Cheers!

post that initiated this zine.] Okay, it's kind of two questions, so: "How do you, as a queer femme, or a queer who identifies or is often read as a woman, and who sometimes or often dates straight, cis dudes, experience your queer identity? How do you experience your queer community?"

Devin: So that's for you.

Leah: *[Laughs.]*

Amber: *[To Leah]* Listen! The second part is: "How do you, as a queer person of any gender and expression, who does not often or ever have relationships that could pass for heteronormative, conceptualize of your peers who do?"

Leah: I feel this is loaded with something, like I'm supposed to be angry about it. I know it comes from the fact that people are, they have lots of feelings around it. I don't actually have strong feelings about queer femmes who date cis men. I do have more feelings about it if that queer identifier is claimed but not acted on. If you only date cis men, but you call yourself queer, and you're queer on a gender basis, or whatever, that starts to get weird and sticky.

Devin: So, what happens when it's five years, you haven't seen this person "act" queer, but they've... they are queer.

Leah: Yeah, I don't know. This is something I think about, too. Is there a time frame for it? And, I mean, the easy answer is no, I don't think there is, but... yeah. I don't know.

Devin: It's feelings based, too. Logically when we're sitting here talking about it, there's not a time frame on it, but that doesn't change how you feel when you're talking to an actual human, and you just dealt with some shit fifteen minutes ago, and this person is, "five years ago when..." No! Leave.

Leah: Well, yeah. This is why this conversation is so hard, because my feelings about it are not always logical, they're not always rational, and they're rarely kind.

Devin: *[Cackles.]* That's why I love it.

Amber: That's why this is a hard conversation to have with *you two*, because I do want to answer this question for Katy and for the zine from my perspective in some way. Though I do not at all identify as a "queer femme." [Katy] said, "queer who identifies or is often read as a woman." That is totally fair; I am part of the gendered class, "women", for sure.

Devin: I love that material feminism!

Amber: But my own gender conception is pretty masculinist... [as in, has a masculine way of inhabiting the world and interacting, is not demure, etc.] But I'm presenting as or

are read as women, as femme women, who date cis men? Like... How do I feel about them using the word queer? Is that the question?

Devin: Using the word queer, but also taking up a lot of space in queer communities. I’m thinking more about when you go to a queer event or a queer space and it’s predominantly populated by people who you might not perceive as queer. Have you ever walked into a room and it’s just a bunch of straight women, but it’s actually a bunch of queer people?

Leah: Yes.

Devin: Yeah! So what do you think about that? That’s frustrating for me.

Leah: With femme women, the conversation often ends up being that the worst kind of queer oppression is being invisible to other queers, and that’s totally fucking hard for me. And I get that, like, that sucks. I don’t remember the last time I came out, and I love that. *[Laughs.]* But also, there are at least as many times that I wish that I could disappear and not be seen as queer. Femmes feel invisible in queer culture, butches feel too visible everywhere, and those have their pros and cons in opposite situations. I don’t ever have to come out. I don’t have to be found by other queers; they just see me. I can never find femme queers. I can’t see them, and that sucks for THEM. And it sucks a little bit for me. But the thing is is that because I’m masculine, masculine is talked about as if it is a blanket privilege when [in reality] cis men don’t talk to me like they talk to other men. They still talk down to me; they still harass me. I don’t experience masculinity as a privilege. The exception to that is that a lot of femme women see female masculinity in queer circles as a privilege. I don’t know if it’s because it’s not as common, so it’s sought after...? It’s possible that that’s true in queer circles but, again, this takes me back to if the only time I experience privilege is within an already oppressed community, I have a hard time just calling that a privilege.

Amber: Understandable. It’s complex. But from hearing queer femmes talk a lot about this issue, it comes around to, “masculine queers get to do whatever they want because they’re desired, and there’s a limit of them, and so they can kind of choose who they want and treat them however because they’re just gonna endlessly have a plethora [of choices].”

Devin: *[To Leah]* You get more play than either of us.

Amber: Yeah, we were just talking about that, I was like, “Leah is getting mad sex right now.” Neither of us are getting any, really.

Leah: No! *[Laughing.]* The thing is, I don’t experience female masculinity as desirable, largely. In queer communities there is a certain sect of femmes [for whom] that is who they are after, but I don’t actually find that dynamic easy to find. And I don’t experience my masculinity as desirable by men.

Amber: How about I bring this to the actual question, just because... *[Pulls up a facebook*

LEAH BUCK

A conversation with my parents after being outed:

Mom: She was older than you.

Dad: What about your past boyfriends?

Mom: You’ve been manipulated.

Dad: You’re going through a phase.

Mom: You’re a victim.

Dad: You can’t have it both ways.

Dad: Look what you’re doing to your mother.

Mom: Look what you’re doing to this family.

Me: *shame and confusion intensify*

The only gay experience that was conceivable to my parents was one based on having known your entire life. I didn’t even know being gay was a viable option until I was in the middle of a relationship with another girl.

Each day was a trial in which I had to provide evidence to back my claims to queerness. My parents, my friends, my youth pastors, my girlfriend, they would all examine my findings and decide whether or not they were valid.

My understanding of sexuality became a rigid point system. Gay points for flannels, angst, and denouncing the boys I dated in high school. Straight points for long hair, Jesus, and uncertainty.

Biphobia, for me, was bred out of my pursuit to be “gay enough” to convince others I wasn’t going through a phase. My insecurities led me to invalidate my own experiences and those of other queer people.

The past couple years have been an active fight to dismantle the messages I internalized at seventeen.

Learning about the fluidity of sexuality has led me to a better understanding of

bisexuality, it’s role in my life, and how I can reshape the conversations surrounding the negative connotations of being bi.

However, the most difficult part of coming to terms with my own queerness has been centered around gender rather than sexuality. I find myself wondering if my decisions to present more androgynously are my own or simply a product of feeling the need to be “visibly queer” in order to feel valid, even if I don’t hold others to that same nonexistent standard.

I’d like to be able to end this with new insights and feelings of liberation, but I think being self-confident is a lot like being at peace. It’s a way of living rather than a destination to be reached. Every box I unpack from my past makes it easier to be receptive of new connections, and I’m content in going forward with that knowledge.

The way I identify with queer *is* political, and rooted in lesbian separatism. But it’s hard to make that claim, too. The contemporary form of [lesbian separatism] is queer politics. The problem is people have commodified Bash Back and queer politics and it doesn’t mean the same thing anymore. What is my political identity anymore? I feel fiercely about deconstructing aspects of society, which comes from a queer standpoint, though now [that term has] been watered down.

Leah: So, this distinction between what you do and what you are is based in that modern construction of homosexuality. That naming, with the word homosexual, for the first time you’re able to say that you ARE a homosexual. Not just that you do something that is against sexual mores, but you *are* something. It starts as a diagnosis. At some point, probably in an act of resistance, it becomes embraced as the self. As this essential truth.

Devin: So why are you and I so lodged in our...

Leah: Are you asking if I’m born that way? *[Laughs.]*

Devin: No! But I’m saying both of us have antagonized “born that way,” but I’ve been an effeminate man my whole life. I ended up gay; there is something essential to my experience that has been there forever, but I also believe in the politics of queerness...

Leah: I just – I don’t care. I really don’t. I also experience masculinity that way. You know, I don’t feel that I made choices, but also I’m not comfortable with that as something intrinsic, either.

Amber: Is the question – is queer liberation about assimilation? Is it about the deconstruction of orientation and gender for everyone? Is it about exclusivity?

Devin: I think it’s about making room for more interpretations of things. So, it’s not about abolition and it’s not about assimilation; it’s about extrapolation and expansion.

Amber: Queer liberation, in my sense, [is the privilege for all] to walk around safely. So, cousins that are fucking, black trans women, additive androgynists... walk around safely. It’s also about moving away from Puritan roots and becoming frank about what everybody wants in life – which for me is to not live in this super fucked up, gendered system. But I also know that everybody’s configuration of queer liberation is probably a lot different than mine. Some people would be totally disgusted that I would say interfamilial sex needs to be liberated, but that’s how I feel!

Devin: I mean, I agree; we’ve talked about that. [I think] queer liberation contributes to that specific utopic vision, which I also have, of large scale sexual, gender, and anti-familial, anti-traditionalist liberation. [But] I feel that queerness, especially right now, is an ontology, a way of being.

Leah: I guess I still don’t understand what the question is? How do I feel about people who

Leah: But they do gay shit.

Amber: And that’s more important to Leah! It’s the act! And that’s where I can’t agree, totally.

Leah: *[Laughs.]* I don’t give two shits how you identify; you’re having gay sex. Fine. You can call yourself straight all day and I don’t give a shit, but I do care if you’re having gay sex. *[Laughing.]* No, but seriously.

Amber: One is okay, but the other one is not. Why? Someone identifies as straight and is having gay sex; that’s cool. Someone identifies as gay but is having straight sex...

Leah: It’s not that one is or isn’t cool; I just don’t care what your identity is. *[Laughs.]* So remember when I was fucking [someone] who was having this crisis about whether or not she was gay, and I kept being, “Fuck if I know, but you’re having gay sex.” That’s all I care about.

Amber: The person that’s identifying as straight and in a 20 year lesbian relationship – I don’t want to invisibilize their identity. I think it’s interesting.

Devin: Those people still have space in the queer community.

Amber: The “they’re gay because they’re having gay sex” stance, people talk in those terms a lot –

Leah: No, no, no. I’m not saying they’re gay because they’re having gay sex. I’m saying I don’t give a shit what they are, but they are having gay sex. I’m not going to impose that on somebody as an identity. But they’re doing shit that’s queer. And that matters to me.

Devin: So you’re thinking of queerness as –

Amber: – behavior-based.

Devin: But not just behavior-based, because I’m in a similar camp as you, [Leah], but I would say if you’re doing certain things that are transgressive, or you have a transgressive experience that rides against straight culture, you’re gaining ontology and therefore able to make epistemic claims on behalf of queerness... *[Aside:]* What happens when I’m having extremely straight sex, but between two men?

Amber: I feel of two minds about it because before heterosexuality and homosexuality became a huge deal, it was a marker of hypersexuality one way or another in the DSM.

Leah: Wait, what was?

Amber: “Sexual orientation” is a modern thing; it’s only existed the last hundred years.

ON BEING BISEXUAL AND MY LAYERS OF MIDWESTERN SHAME

BY LILY

“Honey, I don’t think you should bring your friend to this event”.

My mother means my girlfriend and doesn’t want her around. I feel a sharp pain in my chest and the physical urge to hide or leave. I’m holding back tears and trying to keep my voice casual.

“But, my sister is bringing her boyfriend, I thought it would be okay to bring my girlfriend.” I’m crushed. My family has always been so important to me. I thought they might be happy for me.

“I don’t think it would be a good idea. I just want to be respectful.”

Now I’m stuck weighing whether the fight is worth having her there, wondering how I will tell my girlfriend, and wishing I could just curl up and disappear.

I’m a femme lady with a lot of privilege (white, able-bodied, educated). Still, shame about being bisexual and queer has seemed insurmountable for me for most of my life. I remember in 8th grade when I first figured out I liked girls.

“I think that I think girls are cute just like how we were talking about cute boys,” I told my best friend.

“Oh, I don’t think you do. I’m your best friend and I am pretty sure you don’t like girls like that. I know you. You thought John was cute, didn’t you? You like boys! I don’t think you have to worry about being one of those people that likes girls.”

At the time, she was very Catholic, and she was doing her best to comfort me. We’re still good friends now and she warmed up a lot to me being queer, but I’ve encountered the unspoken assumption that queer is bad over and over again in the Midwest. The people that love me don’t think I am queer, because they know I’m good.

These encounters can be confusing. My best friend did and does love me dearly. She really didn’t mean to hurt me; she really genuinely thought she was helping. She thought she was helping because she assumed that it is a fact of the universe that being queer is a bad

thing. When my family and friends are addressing me specifically, they rarely spell that thought out. If pressed, my mother will say that she’s tolerant of LGBT people and even point to the lesbian couple that runs her favorite pottery shop. When I came out to my parents, my mom said, “That’s fine, as long as you marry a man. Oh and PLEASE don’t tell anyone else, especially my side of the family.”

In college I dated and had sex with women and men, but still I hesitated to identify as bisexual or queer. I felt like I didn’t fit the criteria. I saw the girls in my high school who did have the courage to come out. I did not feel like I was as brave as they were. They seemed so sure and I felt like I had nothing figured out. I felt like they had been born that way and I, fearful and questioning, was hopeless.

I’m really ashamed to admit that another part of not wanting to label myself was that I felt like I should be embarrassed about my flaw in being bisexual. I would not have been able to articulate it then, the same way that my best friend wouldn’t have been able to say this in 8th grade, but I knew in my bones that being queer was a bad thing and that I should be appropriately ashamed about it.

See how even now I’m ashamed of feeling shame? It all builds on itself. I’m ashamed of being queer, of not being queer enough, of feeling shame about being queer, and especially about feeling shame about not being queer enough.

Can we sit with that shame and sort it together? One surprising and essential thing about shame is if you are able to drag it into the light (usually with the help of a few trusted loved ones), then it can melt away. No matter how many times I do this, I still feel like it won’t work – and then it does.

Let’s first sit with my shame about being queer. It’s one of my values to be a good daughter and it’s important to me to be a good member of my community and get along with people. I feel so bad that I am not living up to my mother’s expectations and so scared of being rejected by my community. It’s hard for me to imagine that these values are at odds with how important it is for me to know and love myself, and now to love my new queer community. However, sometimes they are at odds. At the end of the day I know I am happy with my decision to radically love myself. Sometimes radically loving myself means navigating the rest of world in a way to protect myself. It means not holding my girlfriend’s hand in front of frat row out of fear for the both of us. Radically loving myself could look like being more strategically closeted to avoid harm. But I am not going to closet myself to spare my mother of her disappointment. I’m not going to hurt myself to help my mother cope with her distress about who I am. My mom and I used to be close and hiding all the joy in my life makes me feel like I’m doing something wrong. I know who am isn’t wrong. In sitting through this shame, I uncover pride in my decisions and myself.

Now, let’s examine my shame about not being queer enough. I feel really bad about it, but I have this unreasonable fear that maybe I’m doing it for attention. Is the patriarchy right when it tells me that bi women are just seeking attention from men? Of course, I know this

Amber: [BSDM] doesn’t interact with queerness because it’s 50 fucking shades of gray and it’s completely normalized at this point. I talked about fetlife in a work meeting today, okay?

Leah: I agree with you but every time a cis-het person talks about BDSM I want to tell them to thank a queer. BDSM came from queers.

Devin: Also I will say your experience is different than ours; it’s just really hard to find intensely gay or lesbian, or even sometimes queer [spaces/communities] and not come up head to head with the BDSM thing.

Amber: I do understand how it overlaps, but a het couple who are monogamous, have children, are married, are into BDSM – I don’t read that as queer. At this point, with this conversation and how I feel about it is that queer is a blanket; it’s really not stitched together well, and all kinds of people can fall into it.

Devin: So, what happens when we’re trying to have this conversation now, but so much of queer theory is built off of gay experiences, specifically 1970’s lesbian politics, where we’re talking about lesbianism as a political choice and we’re talking about people who keep their identity as straight, especially their sexual orientation, but are with a woman either for personal or political reasons?

Amber: We don’t have separatism now.

Devin: But what we do [have] now is a fairly similar phenomenon which is straight women being with men and identifying as queer... or antithesis, or complimentary...

Leah: It’s an inversion.

Amber: Or it signifies a greater gender struggle, which is: as women gain more economic independence they have less reasons to seek out a heterosexual relationship to make them financially sound. I heard on NPR the other day this Japanese woman saying, “I have no interest in messing with dudes. They suck; I’m not interested in sex with them. I’m just happy with my cat, being single. There’s no reason for me to get married; I have a job.” So it could be women are also disidentified and have leverage to do that financially.

Devin: But we’re talking about specifically women, femme people, and straight-passing, female-passing people who are in relationships predominantly or actively with men, who are still really trying to stake a claim as a queer person. And juxtaposed to the people who are in 20, 30, 40 year relationships with lesbian women who are like, “No, I’m still a straight woman.”

Amber: Do we deny their identity?

Devin: No. They’re still straight and they’re still in a lesbian relationship. It exists.

been lost. And the historical factor is that people were fighting this shit out because of sex.

Leah: Right, it wasn't about this oppression on the basis of this internal identity that feels intrinsic and borne and essential.

Devin: I will say I do agree with all of this, but I want to say, on the record: I do believe that asexuals experience queerness.

Amber: Of course.

Devin: There are plenty of "queer women" who pass as straight, who are asexual, and that's like a whole different thing to unpack, in maybe the second volume of this zine, *[leans into mic]* hopefully.

Leah: *[Laughs.]* To me, categorically, it doesn't actually fit. That's one of those cases to me, that asexual folds into queerness because that's a place where they can find community. And it's for the same reasons that crip communities and queer communities overlap; they find a home. But in a strict categorical sense, that doesn't actually fit to me at all.

Amber: I disagree, because it's still a completely fucked and marginalized group and based on orientation.

Leah: I mean, it still is about sex. It's about a void of sex. So, yeah, I agree with that.

Amber: Okay, what about this? I'm gonna really push it.

Devin: Yes.

Amber: So how about hypersexual [cis women] who are ONLY WITH MEN. I've known hypersexual folks talk about being fairly ostracized because they're women.

Leah: That's just women and lasciviousness though, isn't it? Does lasciviousness fall into queer? Is that what you were getting at?

Amber: I'm saying any kind of gender aberration – the danger that comes with [that aberration] is perhaps not as oppressed of an experience; it's different, but it's still gender non-compliance [and potentially queer].

Devin: In high school, all of the slutty girls hang out with the gay guys or the lesbians. But I can't say that it's queer. It's sexually deviant, just like I can say that BDSM people have an overlap with queer people and often end up in similar spaces.

Amber: For some reason I don't care about BDSM.

Leah: What don't you care about though?

isn't true. The many many hours I spend alone with my girlfriend aren't for male attention. I don't even want male attention! Men in general treat me poorly and I go out of my way to avoid men. Why would I have deep meaningful relationships with women in order to get attention from men? How did the patriarchy get so into my head that it sounds like my own voice? Under everything, I still sometimes have this pernicious assumption, usually unspoken, that my sexuality is not for me to determine. I'm femme and men like me, so I am straight, right? Isn't that the image of me that I see reinforced around me in every situation every day? That image can seem somehow more valid than my own thoughts and feelings about myself. I'm so scared that the patriarchy is right, that that is how it really works. But if I sit with it, then I can usually reassure myself and smile about how joyful women make me.

My shame about feeling shame about being queer is more personal. Somehow I can feel a deep stabbing shame about being queer and also a horrible guilt that I feel any shame at all. Why don't I have this already figured out? How can I be surrounded by such amazing, delightful queer people all the time and still feel bad about being this way after being on the phone with my mom for just a few minutes? The obvious answer is that I'm human. It's human to feel shame when society at large and some of the people who are close to you explicitly shame you. In order to 'be a good queer,' I don't owe it to the movement to never feel bad. Sometimes people try to make you feel bad and it works. When your sister doesn't want your girlfriend at her wedding, it's okay to cry about it. It's okay to wonder if your life would be easier if you were straight like she is. It doesn't make me any less queer to feel this way and it's not a betrayal of my community to feel the pain inflicted on me.

It is even more personal still for me to feel shame about my shame about not being queer enough. I'm scared that this feeling of not being sure enough of myself is the proof that I'm making it all up. It's a reiteration of the fear that the patriarchy gets to define my sexuality, but instead of acting outside of me in repeated stereotyped images from the media, it's inside my own head and heart, using my doubt against me. I'm scared that any wavering on how public I want to be or how I want to label myself is verification of all the harmful myths I've been told about bisexuals. I can hear the voices echoing in my head, "she's just doing it for attention," "just a slut," "not real." I hate that I don't have this figured out yet. I hate how much the patriarchy hurts me and I feel somehow that if I were stronger, I wouldn't let it affect me so much. But I'm human! Feeling complex emotions doesn't mean I have to forfeit my agency.

I can't be the only one who feels shame related to my queerness. I know others' shame is probably all wrapped up differently, but I can say that sitting with my shame instead of hiding it and hiding from it has been essential in living my best queer life. Thank you for sitting with me.

With love and solidarity,
Lily

QUEER PRIVILEGES AND FUNCTIONALITIES

BY DEVIN MICHAEL LEATHERMAN

So I love the Queer moniker. As a gay man who has always been on the fringes of that increasingly sponsored identity camp of capital-G-Gay, a liberated queerness found in the Queer community allowed me to flourish and stretch into myself in unique ways. Queer has played with gender, acknowledged race, and allowed me to deal with a lot of self hate through working out what it means to be at times effeminate, butch, queeny, stone, and fluid. The larger presence of queer women, bi- and pan- sexuals, trans and non-binary siblings, and even some differently-straight folks has always added to this complex of community and conversation.

This identity group has allowed me, too, to add to my identity instead of increasingly chipping away at it. Meaning I can remain a gay man (I personally keep the title of gay man for reasons of socialization and kinship that will always exist) while retaining the option to not exclusively date gay men. Removing a lot of toxic rhetoric instilled through being socialized as Gay. Acknowledging the ways that effeminate men too often feel pressured to reify their identities under patriarchal forces, I was able to shed expectations and unhealthy practices around genitalia and gender. I have thus far had no relationships with women, but Queer allows me to if the right stud or whomever shows up. It has also empowered me to date transmen which I am hopefully starting to see happen within the larger Gay community as well. The ways in which this makes me feel “more queer” as opposed to “less gay” is affirmative and adds to the beauty of Queer as an always multivalent, vibrant, blooming organism.

This feeling extends to an appreciation toward inverse experiences, such as that of the straight-socialized woman falling into Queer and being able to add to her identity and move into a state of actively having queer partnerships. However, recently, there have been more and more Queer identified people who walk through the world as women and have predominately straight relationships and, en masse, can cause agitation. Maybe this agitation is good, catalyzing growth in the queer community, or maybe like an agitator in a washing machine it risks straight washing what we’ve accumulated and blanding the Queer vibe. I think that both of these happen in different situations, and thankfully, as a whole, this phenomenon does not risk damaging the queer community. I will always welcome these folks into our community.

However:

I would like to acknowledge situations in which these folks abrade my existence. I hope to reflect on their privileges and functionality in the community, and also the larger functional

because you have kinky sex. No one is oppressing your kinky sex.

Devin: But there are lots of people that could or would be doing it and can’t. So it’s [suppressed] in that way...

Leah: This is a little bit of an old man way to approach this but there’s a part of me that is like, “You didn’t fucking earn anything.”

Devin: Yeah! Maybe, you don’t have to earn it but wait fucking more than 5 months. You know? Don’t realize you’re queer and then the next day be, “I’m queer and let me tell you about it...”

Amber: And take up a lot of space... There are way less stakes for someone who is in a passing het couple, so if queerness and queer desire is also about *risk* and the danger of...

Devin: Well, I mean, what does the word queer mean?

Amber: That’s what this conversation is about and it’s hard to unpack –

Devin: No, I mean originally. Queer means different. Queer is markedly different. People never used that word as like, “I just *feel* a little queer.” No. It’s like, “that thing is queer.” It’s a way of marking something as unfitting, disjointed; doesn’t belong, but exists.

Amber: I don’t know how else to call some of my desires as anything but queer desire because I don’t see them represented in any way. Some of [my desires] match up in the way that people think about queer because it’s with someone else that also is female-bodied, but when it’s not – my desire is still not represented in a way that’s normalized. I end up not knowing what to call it.

Devin: It’s still queer. I still think *you’re* queer.

Leah: Queer for me, it can be about what you do and it can be about what you desire. I really hate when queer ends being about who you are and how you identify. I completely hate identity. But desire and...

Leah: and **Devin:** Action.

Leah: That’s queer.

Amber: [*Laughs.*] It’s harder for me to say that so definitively, because then it becomes a slippery slope –

Leah: It’s a very slippery slope. [*Laughs.*]

Amber: But I mostly agree that at this point we need to center sex over identity because it’s

Leah: I don't know. I don't know the answer to that. *[Laughs.]*

Devin: A lot of it boils down to us maybe fighting so hard to find a space and then being annoyed by the fact that it's going away. I can kind of be a bit of a gender essentialist at times, but I'm also about the queer utopia in the future... That's why I loved black and brown queer spaces when I found them, because there were just MORE genders. Now I'm in this white academic [space] that's really trying to move toward no gender, and I'm like *[grunts]*... When I'm confused I go back to indigenous and old frames of knowledge – they include space for permutations of gender, different genders, and inversions of gender.

Amber: It's probably dangerous to have any ideal, right? And any ideal that can be made the top.

Leah: But queer – it benefits from that flexibility and that formlessness. Drawing really hard lines around queerness – queerness doesn't benefit from that. But not drawing those lines is what makes it really formless which is what makes it possible for it to be everything, which makes it also nothing.

Amber: Which makes it vulnerable to being occupied, too.

Leah: The way [this] zine was presented to me was, “How do you feel about femmes who also date cis men?” And I was like, “Whoa, I don't want to touch that at all!” *[Laughs.]*

Amber: The struggle for people dealing with visible markers of an oppressed identity, like butch women, [is important context] for this other question about the struggle for queers that pass as straight. It's a dicey thing to go into because straight-passing folks actually just have a ton of privilege. I mean I deal with my own sense of aloneness and lack of a community in some ways, but also I have a LOT of privilege because I'm not being HARD ID'd as an oppressed person based on [what I look like or who I date]. So I wonder about this zine and where the topic is gonna go. Is it gonna be a lot of people being like, “Oh man, it's tough out here [as a cis woman], dating all these men, and ID-ing as queer.” Because that convo is dangerous.

Leah: The thing that I find hard is that a lot of times when I have conversations with femme women who date cis men, they want everything they do to be seen as queer. Because they are queer, everything they do is queer. I don't mind affirming your queerness, but I'm not willing to call your sex with your boyfriend queer just because you're queer. That is not a queer act.

Amber: If I'm eating my boyfriend's ass out, what is that?

Leah: There are sexual acts that are queerer, and they can occur between heterosexuals. I'm not 100% willing to call – it pisses me off that like... BDSM! If you're into getting spanked, “that's queer.” That's not really enough for me. Because if it only happens in your bedroom and there's no consequences for it out in the real world, I can't call it oppression

context of Queer in my life and why sharing it can be hard.

When I'm complaining about not being able to meet any love interests at music shows, and how our local music scene isn't very queer; a queer friend defends her music scene citing all queer women who pass as straight. I note that none of them are my type. Is that really so queer? She continues to cite instances of the predominantly straight male musicians whom have made out amongst each other at some point in the last decade. At this juncture I finally get across to this friend, whom has always been unable to comprehend my dating choices who are not always radical or Queer or share many of my sociopolitical realities. It is at this juncture I get her to recognize that her city is queer but mine is not, and somehow we both live in it. It is a city full of opportunity for her to exercise queerness safely and not for me. I cannot walk up to someone and hit on them in a space that is not allocated as queer or Gay. One, because of the threat is always present of a straight man being offended/antagonized by my erotic and romantic experience and not often by theirs, and two, because of the actual dearth of Queer men and the lack of mirrored phenomena: very few heteroflexible men accompany women into this new Queer world (so far, I believe this might be changing).

When a queer event happens and all of the organizers are women or femmes who do not always walk through the world as queerly as some: this is an ambivalent issue. Part of it is their having positions of power from which to make these events happen. Being selected for committees, contacted for opportunities, and a “safe” choice by critical institutions. A queer event might even choose organizers who will tow certain lines, or that they feel will tow certain lines so that their gay event does not become a bathhouse or kink party, etc. The other problem is that straight-socialized women and femmes who walk through the world as straight women are expected to perform these feminized tasks and at different levels of awareness are holed into these positions of “party planning”.

This is a problem within and without the queer community. These folks are chosen or step up for roles that they are comfortable in and institutions empower it, and lazier queers are happy to let them, maybe complaining after when they get to the party and there is no Princess Nokia or Sylvester on the playlist and the cosmo to beer ratio is off at the bar. At times one is extending their privilege to help the larger community, and at other times the privilege is being flexed and the role of mouthpiece is gladly assumed.

My third reflective experience is not so easily pointed to, and it leads toward my rumination about function. The fact that within the larger world that Queer is housed in, the moniker of Queer gets you a “card”, an upgrade to your epistemic privilege. You are positioned in a unique space to critique certain institutions and you are given clout by assumption that your perspective is less hazed by worldly privilege. This is somewhat true, but it ignores an important point that the idea of epistemic privilege is not housed in the moniker but in the lived experience. So it takes time to acquire or produce the insight that is assumed by the title.

Straight passing folks: this is my biggest issue and the most discussed among us who

are not you about why your presence can be abrasive. We all have a need to express, and a want to speak on queer things. We have the right to articulate ourselves. At times it is hard when a large part of my understanding and the function that Queer has had in my life is housed in a piece of tooth that was lost to me and is lodged in the tile of the locker room floor in Maysville K-12 in Zanesville Ohio – to hear you speak for me while your understanding is in a series of short term, adult, romantic encounters that are misrecognized as friendship and the frustration of being able to express who you actually are in an authentic way is so inverse to mine. Often I feel that you are confronted with the issue of putting on queerness, its aesthetic – we all are – however some people’s experience comes also from having to take off gayness, in order to put on queerness, or to stylize queerness so as to be safe. This is not always an issue for you. The existential crisis of gay childhood was not an issue for many of you. The shamanic process of coming out as invert is not always one you have walked.

I look forward to doing more world building through this project however, because I have the sneaking suspicion it is not so simple. Do you find yourself trapped in straightness? The positions I spoke of you being relegated to by both queers and straights: can identity feel like that too? Are there forces at work I don’t see, binding you to certain norms? Earlier, I spoke of simply not having expanded my queerness more yet, and yet I easily imply that you are not queer enough. That is violent and I’m sorry.

My frustration comes from being marked by something irreversibly. I have at times prayed to pass, or to be bi or pan. I’ve cried for it in the night. I have prayed for a straight man to love me. Done witchcraft in the parlor to change myself. Put on entire voices and postures in order to survive. For years. I came out to myself three times during childhood, blacking it out each time as I was reswallowed into the school social shuffle. I did not go on a date with a man until I was well into adulthood. My sex life has been contingent on public parks and apps. I can count on my fingers how many times I’ve been flirted with in public. And at the same time you have always been seen as women and I am guilty of constantly forgetting the violence that is set in your path by your passing as a straight woman. To wish to be hit on at a bar is such a rude thing to whine to you! But, on occasion, it’s all I want.

I am excited to learn. To vent. I am excited to cross analyze, especially with the also problematic contingent of gay maleness. I understand the ability to take over a space on accident, a space you really need, but having to learn to take a back seat. I am excited to do just that for you but also to be given space to step on toes. Queerness, above all, especially as I’ve noticed in QPOC spaces, is about listening and humility. It’s about calling yourself out about stuff that no one even noticed, in order to make room for others. It’s also about being able to at times offend in order to survive. You are my sisters and siblings. In the family. Families fight and make up and grow closer. I’m looking forward to all of that.

ways.

Devin: Ok, I want to kind of re-direct. One, I feel like that movement to undo gender, potentially, is the reason why there are so many cis-het women using femme. Because it’s a way to destabilize ‘woman’ and ‘man’ and move toward more spectral ‘feminine-of-center’ or ‘masculine-of-center.’ I want to go back to the thing about femme [as an identity] growing and branching out and butch not doing the same thing... Where you’re saying butch is shrinking, I’m also seeing that on the gay [male] side of things. With this influx of women who are cis-het using femme, or straight-passing using queer, there’s no influx of men using queer who predominantly are straight, or predominantly pass as straight.

Amber: It’ll happen.

Devin: Eventually, yeah but not yet. On the same note, there’s no straight women coming into queer spaces using butch terminology and identifying as butch while predominantly dating men. It’s just interesting to think about what’s happening to butch... A lot of the rhetoric around it ends up being, “the feminine is subjugated.”

Leah: It just turns into this pissing contest between butches and femmes as to who is more oppressed and who has a harder time walking around in the world when really they’re just perfect inversions of each other. I mean it’s that visibility versus invisibility thing. That femmes are dying to be seen, which is exactly what makes it dangerous to walk around in the world. I am dying to just blend in. I have a really hard time seeing my masculinity as a privilege when it’s only within the queer community, when it’s ONLY within an already oppressed community, and when it’s dangerous. I can’t call masculinity, as a blanket statement, a privilege.

Amber: I wonder how some of these people that you’ve met in school that are “gender flatteners” or people that are presenting as non-binary – how they interact with the danger in their presentation. They probably still deal with shit, and maybe even more shit because they’re not conforming to a gender, which is even more confusing to the general masses. Though it could also be argued that to flatten gender or to present “no-gender” reifies the middle, effectively upholding the poles of binary gender instead of destroying it. I don’t know, but I’m sure they’re experiencing some threats and danger as well; it’s probably just much different.

Leah: I really like gender! I really don’t want gender to die. *[Laughs.]*

Amber: I see you as a genderist and I’m somewhere, like, I find both hard because I see gender as a class struggle so intensely. So I don’t like a lot of aspects of it.

Leah: Well, I don’t like cis-het gender, but I love queer gender.

Amber: How do you unburden that, separate it from everything else?

Leah: Katy and I were talking about this the other day – that I would never use femme to refer to a straight, cis woman. That’s only a queer femininity to me. And she was surprised by that. To me, femme is a queer word.

Amber: This is historically true, but it’s being used so differently now.

Leah: Right, right! People are using it for cis-het femininity.

Devin: Well, ok. But wait. I would say one: it’s supposed to be a term of inclusivity; but also I’ve heard it used –

Leah: Inclusivity of who?

Amber: [Femme] is also being occupied in certain ways...

Leah: But that always related to sexuality and attraction... Femme is surviving and like branching out in really big ways while butch is disappearing, which is really strange because they are counterparts. It’s weird how it’s standing on its own two feet. It’s not bad, but I’m confused by it.

Amber: I’ve always thought femme was a specific identity [relating to femme/butch dynamic] and not one that I could personally claim, at all. [A friend of mine] was so ready to claim femme, and questioned why I wouldn’t. A couple years ago if you went to Allied Media Conference and attended the Femme Track – it’s a specific group of people. Now it’s probably any old cis-het can walk in and be, “Sure, I like lipstick and makeup and I’m into talking about this stuff with other people and so I’m femme.” My problem with it lately is there’s a hierarchy of feminine identities and femme has been put at the top. So if you are a woman but you don’t identify as femme, you are subjugated by femme-ness. Femme has become the ideal in this queer context. So I’m just like, “Okay.” I mean that’s fine. It is good for people to claim something that’s been so shit on for a long time and say it’s valuable, but I don’t know why we’re reverting to a hierarchy of identities to do that.

Leah: That feels surprising to me, because that doesn’t feel typical anymore. It’s [now] this flattening out of gender, and this “gender is dead” thing; that seems to be the goal. At least maybe this is a college thing too, “There is no gender.” Like, agender is something that really confuses me because how can anybody be without gender. You can not claim it, you can not own it... you can not identify with it. But there’s two versions of that, right? There’s this internal version, but you can’t tell somebody walking down the street that you’re without gender... It’s possible to not identify with the gender you present as but it’s unreasonable to expect that people will not see a gender. That people will not impose a gender on you.

Amber: That’s an argument that’s happening right now. It’s a cultural split, too, because some people are not comfortable putting expectations on others to conform to their needs, and some people are like, “No, bitch. You have to do what I want.” Both are valid, in some

J PGA

AS INTERVIEWED BY KATY CLARK

Katy: So, do you want to start out by introducing yourself, or giving any kind of context to who you are?

J PGA: I guess I am a person of many identities. So, since I was 12 or something, I’ve considered myself pan/queer, and I grew up in a Jewish-Mexican household, and as I got older, I became disabled. So to have all this very intersectional... in one person, it’s difficult, combining all these different things and all these different spaces. That’s what I struggle with.

Katy: It sounded like, when I put the post on Facebook about the zine, that you wanted to contribute, but also felt maybe hesitant? Is that accurate?

J PGA: Yeah, it’s just because I seem fairly “heteronormative” and I’m in a straight relationship in this period of my life – I mean, I’m gonna stay with my husband for ever, that’s the plan until we have robot bodies and the universe dies. That’s the goal. [Laughter.] But, yeah, that hasn’t always been the case, and I will always get crushes on other people and that’s okay. Or, other types of people I guess. I don’t know. I seem very passable, for something that wouldn’t necessarily get my rights taken away or get me beaten up, even though I have been. So I feel like I’m pretty safe right now, even though there’s so much crap going on in the world. So I feel kind of guilty taking the space away, I suppose.

Katy: In the zine, you mean? Or just in general?

J PGA: Or, yeah, not just in the zine, but in the community in general, yeah. Cause I feel very privileged and really freaking white for being Mexican; you can’t really tell if someone’s Jewish; the only real identity people know is that I’m disabled because I use a wheelchair, so. Most people don’t pick on people who are in a wheelchair. I mean, they definitely do messed up things in Parliament, or in the Senate, but... not so much in public, face to face.

Katy: So how do you experience the different identities that you mentioned intersecting with your queerness?

J PGA: Well, recently it’s actually been quite difficult because – I’m sure you’ve heard about this – in some of the Pride parades, they’re not allowing the Star of David, because people are saying it’s triggering, because –

Katy: Because of what’s happening in Palestine?

J PGA: – because of Zionism, yeah, and it’s like, well, the Star of David is a symbol for all Jews, and it’s kind of us taking back what was printed on us during the Holocaust, and making that our own. And not every Jew – like, I am not a Zionist at all, I believe Palestine should be free – but I still wear a Star of David necklace, because I’m Jewish. So I feel like that is really problematic, saying basically that if Jews want to be proud of their Jewish religion, and also proud of their sexual orientation, saying that you can’t do that here is very problematic. That has given me – I mean, I’m watching it all from a hospital bed, usually I would be there in person – I just feel so frustrated that there’s nothing I can do. So that is right now the thing that is bothering me the most.

The other thing is that there’s a huge problem with accessibility at Pride events, where if you’re not completely able-bodied, then there’s not space for you. They never, or very rarely, have organizers that are disabled. Or they try – like London Pride for example had a bunch of wheelchairs that you could rent, but no way of getting to Pride that was accessible, so it was like... how do you get there to use the wheelchairs? But they thought about it half way... but then they typically don’t have anyone that is disabled, they don’t think about the whole picture.

Katy: Do you feel like, the way that you talked about understanding that you walk through the world [sic] with a degree of privilege because of the way that some of your more marginalized identities are invisible to others, do you feel like other people think that about you also and treat you differently because of it?

J PGA: Oh, I have no idea. I try not to pay too much attention to stuff like that, cause if I did I would absolutely just lose it. Do you know what I mean? Yeah, I have felt sort of like I can’t speak up around other Hispanic people, like even around my cousins when they’re talking about their experiences, because I’m not as tan as them. I have exactly as much Mexican blood as them, they’re mixed as well, it’s just their mixture ended up being darker. So, yeah, I feel like I don’t want to talk over them, even in the familial setting. But at the same time I have experienced things because my last name is Gutierrez, or when I was little I was tanner and looked more Hispanic, or went out with my mom, who was definitely treated differently, and saw the way she was treated. By the police, especially. Not what you want. So, I am quite lucky, but...

Katy: Do you ever feel excluded from the queer community? I mean, I guess you already talked some about Pride and how, if it’s not accessible, then you are being excluded.

J PGA: Yeah, and I think there’s a lot of erasure of bi- and pan- people. Because they don’t always present as the typically “queer” idea that people have. But, you know, just because I’m with a man right now doesn’t mean I don’t know what it’s like to be with someone else. But even if I didn’t – even if I had never dated a woman or whatever – it still wouldn’t matter, because that’s how I feel and I should still be included.

Katy: How would you like the queer community at large or your queer friends specifically to change the way they speak or behave around these issues to make you feel more

Devin: The difference between theory and praxis.

Amber: Do you think [queer has been] subsumed by weirdness and awkwardness...? Basically the awkward kid thinks, “I don’t know where I fit, oh I’ll fit here?”

Leah: Yeah, that’s happened a lot. Which – I don’t want to say that that’s 100% bad, but if queer is like everything then it’s also like nothing.

Amber: We’re talking about academia and its role in [the usage of] queer. There are definitely some academics and researchers talking about this problem, specifically Rostom, who went all the way up to the Ph.D level at [University of Michigan], and concluded “Queer means nothing. There’s no stakes in queer. It’s just an academic term at this point. It doesn’t reference any group of people, any location, any means.” It’s now this politicized thing that makes no sense. And that’s from someone who’s a Queer Studies professor. *[Laughs.]* So...

Devin: So, what do we do if queer theory has theorized queer out of the realm of experience and community, but yet we are all three people, while having different locations in the “LGBTQ spectrum,” [who] still use the moniker ‘queer?’ And specifically the community ‘queer’ as a safe space? Like I’m safe in assuming that if there were a gay night and a queer night happening at the same time, we would all go to the queer one with a certain set of assumptions about what that means. But we’re also all complaining that queerness in academia, as theory, and as a social movement is increasingly problematic and creating a rift.

Amber: [Queer theory] in part, is where my dysphoria with “queer” is coming from. Queer has become colonized along the lines of class and race, access to education, and whatever else. It becomes a lifestyle identity, something that one uses to differentiate oneself from ‘the other’ – which are people with less access.

Leah: I say queer mostly to denote a certain political orientation, but I’m more alienated by it all the time and more drawn towards gay and lesbian again, which is really confusing for me.

Devin: Yeah! I’m having the same moment.

Leah: Um, yeah. I find that I can’t rely on queer to mean the politics that I use it to mean. Queer is neo-lib now. I use it, still, for lack of a better term, but that’s also why I use words like butch and dyke still, which I never hear out of people’s mouths.

Devin: I’m in a similar situation with that, with queen and bottom and whatever. And femme even to some extent, but... femme’s been co-opted though. Femme even skipped most of the gay community – it went straight from the black and Latino, gay community to the white, queer community, and never really...

Amber: I don't really encounter that much performative sexuality like that here. I mostly see young women holding each other's hands walking down the street every day.

Leah: *[Laughs.]*

Amber: That's what I see. Dykeness is fairly visible in Ypsi. Yeah, especially the younger ones.

Leah: But do you think it's female masculinity, or do you think it's, like, 'dyke?' I see a lot of transmasculinity in Ypsi.

Amber: There's that too. I see straight passing women, holding hands walking down the street, that are pretty young. Yes, there's also a transmasculine element that is fairly visible, but maybe it's hard to talk about that at this moment.

Leah: I can't tell if the really granular identity stuff is new or if it's a class thing. I didn't start hearing terms like 'demi-' or 'sapio-' or 'pan-' until college. And I was already 22 when I started college. I was already out for many years and in gay communities for many years and I never started hearing those words until college, and so I don't know if that coincided with me starting college or if that's just the way college kids talk about identity.

Amber: Both. Well, with Eastern [Michigan University] – the academic queers are not a part of Ypsilanti at all. Almost none of them.

Leah: Yeah. That's the shit that annoys me. I don't really see those queers as part of the Ypsi community but I do see that conversation seeping into it.

Amber: How? I want to know.

Leah: Well, part of it is everything unfolds in the internet now. I don't know if those conversations would have such a crossover if people weren't talking the way they do on social media.

Devin: This kind of goes back to Stone Butch Blues. The idea that queerness for generations now has been slowly taken away from predominantly working class people and given over to other class and education brackets. I go to queer, especially punk and gay events, and I see one group of people, and then I go to school and I see a different group of people. The conversations are very different. So maybe what I'm experiencing at times of, "Well, you don't know what it's like to be queer," is because they don't know what it's like to be *my* kind of queer which is, AT the gay bar with other working class folks and people from all class ranges...

Leah: But also do they know how to DO queer? Not do they just know how to be queer and feel queer and identify as queer, but do they act on those feelings? That's a really big distinction for me.

included, more often?

J PGA: I think, when organizing events, to include more than just, sort of, your "basic" people. I don't know if that makes sense. To include people with more identities. Even if it's not a Jewish, Hispanic, disabled person, if you can cover as many identities as possible in your organization of events then you're going to get a better outcome of people coming together. So that I think would be number one, especially in terms of accessibility. If you have disabled people on your board of organization, then they're going to tell you how to best do things. I mean, obviously not every disabled person knows what's best for every other disabled person, but they have a lot – especially disability activists – have a lot more experience than someone who's not. And it's so often excluded. Even big marches, like the Women's March, NYC Pride – completely excluded. Really unfortunate.

Katy: So one thing people have sometimes said to me is that, with regards to bi- or pan-sexual women, I've heard people claim that we would use the term queer in a search to give meaning to our perspective by [calling] it a marginalized one. So some people say that we use this word not because we actually are queer, but because we're searching for the ground to stand on that having a marginalized identity would give us. That we're claiming this term because having a marginalized identity would make other people listen to us, essentially. How do you feel, or what do you think about, when you hear that?

J PGA: In reality, people are a lot more likely to listen to you if you don't have a marginalized identity. You know? It's kind of the opposite. And claiming an identity that comes with so much strife and pain and confusion... like, when you're a little girl and you're like why do I like all people, but those other girls only like some people? Like I have a crush on Spock, and also Uhura, what's that about? It's Star Trek, you know. I just, I don't think it's any easier having all of these identities – it's not easier. And people don't listen to you more. People are less likely to listen. And I certainly wouldn't claim anything like that if I didn't have to, and I didn't, for a really long time –

Katy: Oh, really?

J PGA: Yeah, because, I knew when I was 11 or 12 – I talked to a friend, and they told me about pansexuality, and I was like, oh my gosh, that is exactly how I feel. I knew from such an early age but because of the stigma around – it's a weird stigma, like you're not enough on either side of the aisle – I didn't really come out until a few years ago. So, early twenties, even though I had already known for like 10 years. And it wasn't until after I had already dated people of the same sex, even after that I wouldn't admit it.

Katy: Really?

J PGA: Yeah, cause it felt like... well, for one thing, it was really embarrassing because I came out as straight to my parents as a teenager, because they didn't want to assume anything, which I think is really great. But then I kind of felt like, this is really awkward taking that back. But also, like, telling other people and having them be like, "Okay, you're

now married to a man and this is years ago, can you still really say that?”

Katy: So you were already married to [your husband] by the time you came out?

J PGA: Yeah. *[Laughter.]*

Katy: And how did your friends receive it? Because it sounds like you had some trepidation or fear about what they would say – what did they actually say?

J PGA: So my husband, he was cool with it. And the majority of my friends were like, that’s cool. My mom – I think I came out to her on accident. Everyone was fine about it. But there did seem to be a bit of competition with my other bi friends, and I felt really weird about that.

Katy: Can you say more about that?

J PGA: Like they’ve been with more people of the same sex, or something, like let’s compare notes.

Katy: So the competition is to prove how gay of a bi person you are?

J PGA: Exactly. I just felt like it was really misogynistic and I didn’t want to participate. It felt uncomfortable. Because, I really don’t like in general talking about people as sexual objects. I like people for who they are – that’s the whole thing about being pan, the person inside has nothing to do with... yeah, so, I just felt really uncomfortable.

Katy: So do you use two different identity markers, pansexual and queer, or do you primarily use pansexual?

J PGA: It sort of depends on what I’m talking about. If I’m talking about sexuality, yeah, usually pansexual. But I do think I fit into the queer box because I’m also like, not 100% sure about gender identity. I always considered myself just [J], and never really thought about it until other people were talking about it. Although, to be honest, growing up I really wanted to be called Felix but when I told my family they thought it was weird so I dropped it. I honestly didn’t know about other gender identities until 2012 and a great talk with my sister. It was like a whole world of possibilities and terms for how I feel inside were shown to me all at once and it was intense and emotional. And I was like, shit, is this really something I get to decide? Fuck, I have no idea. How does anyone have any idea? But I guess some people do – like really clear, strong ideas. I just don’t. I never have.

Katy: So the word queer has an element of gender identity in it for you?

J PGA: Yeah.

Katy: Do you notice any differences in the queer community in the UK compared to what

CONVERSATION #3

AMBER FELLOWS, LEAH M., & DEVIN MICHAEL LEATHERMAN

Devin: How do we all feel about it being called a phenomenon? I like that term. Of a more recent trend of a lot of queer people that don’t necessarily pass as queer... in queer spaces in a high volume.

Leah: You think that’s new?

Devin: *[Laughs.]* In the way that it’s operating now, yeah. There have always been straight passing people, but I don’t think there have always been [queer] people who are functionally in relationships with the opposite gender...

Leah: Yeah, well, there’s a currency, too, right now with identifying as queer.

Amber: There’s a geographical-locational context too, because in any more rural, less liberal town, the demarcations would be really clear. Like, this is the gay bar. This is the only spot to congregate. Whereas, Ypsi is, “Well, everyone’s kinda [on some alternative-lifestyle continuum].” There’s more people who put themselves in queer spaces and think that it’s chill because we’re so progressive or whatever, but that doesn’t confront the space that’s being taken up. And there’s no clear line to the space in Ypsi, so it’s harder to claim that someone is [inauthentically] taking it up.

Leah: Well, what is less gay about it [is that] we know that most people that come to Pride aren’t gay; *[laughing]* that’s straight tourism. Couples and babies.

Amber: Families and cops.

Devin: Mhm. To antagonize that – so, 15 years ago, in rural Ohio, I still knew specifically a lot of women who used bisexuality as some sort of currency.

Leah: You feel like it was a currency? I usually hear bisexuality as, like, a mediating anchor. It’s a way to stay anchored to straightness. That’s one that I actually don’t find to be a currency as often, or don’t interpret it that way as often.

Amber: It’s been completely abandoned as a term too, at this point.

Devin: This was 12 years ago in a small town. It was a way for people who existed predominantly as straight to have something interesting about them, but the phenomenon as it exists now IS very local, but is very much not about attracting men.

If I use my body to say

Did you know? Queer women
can also be white, nondisabled, femme,
with a graduate degree and also
sometimes date men!



WE LIVE
AMONG YOU

in a totally
non-threatening
way! ☺ ♻️ ♥

...That seems like a fundamental betrayal
of my siblings who are butch, or POC, or
have disabilities, or who have ~~non-student~~
alternative educational backgrounds, or
who don't date men. I want to work
towards a system of fighting erasure
while simultaneously saying,

All queer people matter, and
we need to see our struggle as
liberational, not focusing on
appealing to heterosexuality.

(Conclusions are phallogocentric, so I'm just
going to stop here...)

you experienced in the US?

J PGA: I think people are a lot bolder here, in certain ways. It's like, 90% of the time, British queer people have to be just British, and go about their day drinking tea and having small talk about the weather, whatever. And then when Pride, or any other big event like the Carnival happens, everyone just lets loose and is completely themselves. And it's a lot more than it is in the US because people are a lot more reserved here, so the letting loose is so much more, and it's incredible. It's such a feeling – I've been to quite a few Pride events in the US and in Canada, and the feeling here is very different.

Katy: What you said about how in the UK it seems like in day to day life, the emphasis is on being British – like there is some broader, more overarching way that people are called to patriotism and to identify with the nationstate and live that identity over their queerness – if being British is such an important identity, is it important enough to sort of smooth over these differences in sexuality? And then within that, these differences in ways a queer identity is lived?

J PGA: I've been thinking about this a lot in the past week in many different contexts. I really think the emphasis on British identity comes from WWII when the blitz was going on. The whole put your head down and work, tea can fix anything, keep calm and carry on, etc all comes from then. People who may not consider themselves to be patriotic over here still tend to be. The majority of the UK believes that if you live here you are British and take pride in that. I think for most country comes first. Unless you are in Soho or Brighton most people seem to be much quieter about sexuality, especially men, because they are told to not feel anything but that's a whole different bag a crisps. I think just in general the sensibility here is to be quiet. Like you don't talk on buses or the tube, no talking to strangers unless intoxicated or at a sporting event, people are private about their lives during the day. But at the same time people are less likely to assume sexual orientation over here because they don't wish to be nosey and the term "partner" is widely accepted in all types of relationships. So when an event dedicated to an identity happens people here are, like, free for the first time that year to really show their colours and what they love/dislike/care about in addition to their quietness. This happens not just in the queer community but in all sorts like Purim in the Jewish community or people from the West Indies at Nottinghill Carnival.

Katy: Another area sticks out to me about what you've said: on the one hand, the crux of this zine is about invisibility and visibility and how varying experiences in how we are read in the world influence how we interact with each other within the queer community. Your lived experiences as a disabled queer, among your other identities, reveal that beyond your passing as straight, ableism in the queer community and what is an utter failure to consider accessibility in queer spaces is at the forefront of how you are literally able to interact with the queer community or not. I wonder if you can talk some more about that, and sort of break down if you think one of these aspects – being disabled or straight passing – has more to do with how you experience queer community, feel accepted or alienated, and if being disabled bears any relevance to how much you feel like you need a

queer community, or what you need from your queer community.

J PGA: I've thought a lot about which makes it harder for me to access queer spaces and it's a surprisingly difficult question to answer. The thing with being straight passing is mostly an internal issue, 90% of people I've met in the community are super supportive and understanding of my feelings. It's still a hard mental hurdle to get over, in my head I will always tell myself I'm taking up space that could be given to people with more pressing issues. Like their lives literally being under threat. With being disabled sometimes it feels like the exact opposite. Sure people say they support you but they are apathetic to the needs of disabled folk. We are consistently erased from most forms of activism. I mean, let's be honest, you're more likely to see allies represented at pride than disabled, queer people.

Katy: Yeah, that's real.



Eleno's racial Otherness drew attention to his criminalized sexual practices, and his sexual practices only served to emphasize his Otherness.

Along with the persecution of racial Others, the erasure of the veritable epidemic of female friendships strong in Spanish convents helped bolster the aggressive religious nationalism Queen Isabel had left as her legacy. (A century later, however, saw one of the first instances of pinkwashing when someone of noble blood, assigned female at birth, lived as a man in the New World and participated in the genocide of Indigenous people. Eraso was given permission by the Pope to live as a man, in recognition of his military achievements. His contemporaries called him the "Lieutenant Nun.")

I try to remember all this when feeling confused about my place in the Queer Community.



WHAT, I'M A FEMME NOW?

BY AMBROSE MARY

What's the appeal of straight cis dudes?

I always envied the friendship I saw between boys growing up. My cismanfriends scoff at this – apparently, when you're in them, those friendships mostly suck. But a lot of the shortcomings I've heard about cismenfriendships are what I've felt are my own shortcomings within friendships with people of any gender:

- 1) difficulty expressing emotions other than anger
- 2) difficulty with physical contact (other than, like, wrestling)
- 3) difficulty talking about personal stuff

I'm obviously a great friendship catch! But anyway, I liked the idea of a friendship where those shortcomings were built into the relationship, not a personal abnormality that isolated me from other girls.

I think that it's that same feeling of straightforwardness that attracts me to straight cis men now. I know that men are as emotionally complex as anyone else, and a lot of that buried feeling comes out in other, unhealthy ways, but I still feel like in certain ways I can relate to straightcismen more. This has to have something to do with most media I saw growing up being centered around straight cis boys, but it's hard for me to change that now. I'm friends with a lot of amazing women, too, straight and queer and cis and trans, and nonbinary folks, but something about the perceived simplicity of straight cis men keeps me coming back.

It was painful to watch the friendships I had with boys change as we hit puberty, and they started prioritizing girls who were more femme. I realized that there wasn't a place within the male social hierarchy for a "tomboy" any more. I had to find a way to fit into the "real girl" category in order to have a place in the social order, and to maintain my friendships. It wasn't just necessary to preserve my friendships with the boys – girls also didn't want to be friends with someone who wasn't deemed fuckable. I think it would've been different if I'd known of other ways of being masculine as a woman, if someone had shown me how to transition from child-masculine clothes to adult-masculine clothes, but it seemed at the time like the only way to grow up was with poofy homecoming dresses.

I was bad at being femme. My mom is a second-wave feminist, opposed to makeup short skirts etc., so I was mostly on my own. My hair was a disaster until maybe junior or senior year. I "plucked" my unibrow with nail clippers for two years in middle school, leaving red marks that show up in photos for years afterward. I actually damaged the skin so much that hair hardly grows there anymore. I shaved my legs dry, unaware of shaving cream, thinking that razor burn was just part of the deal. My best friend gave me her old bras, because I was too embarrassed to ask my mom to go bra shopping and my friend was too

embarrassed to be seen with me not wearing a bra. It was a HARD TIME, folks. Thank god the children today have tumblr. I figured out the femme stuff in college, and can now pull it off pretty well. I have a limited selection of dresses/skirts that make me feel like I'm not wearing drag. I'm glad I figured it out, because these hips are a gift.

How do you experience your queer identity while in a relationship with a cis straight man?

The main serious relationship of my life (3.5 years) was with a cis man, and I dated a few men before/after that, but I would actually put myself at about a 5 on the kinsey scale (aka pretty darn gay). I'd say that if I'm attracted to 50% of women, I'm attracted to more like 0-.5% of men. However, because the straights are everywhere and because cis straight men are more socialized to make the first move, a disproportionate number of the men I'm attracted to are also vocally attracted to me, compared to the women I'm attracted to.

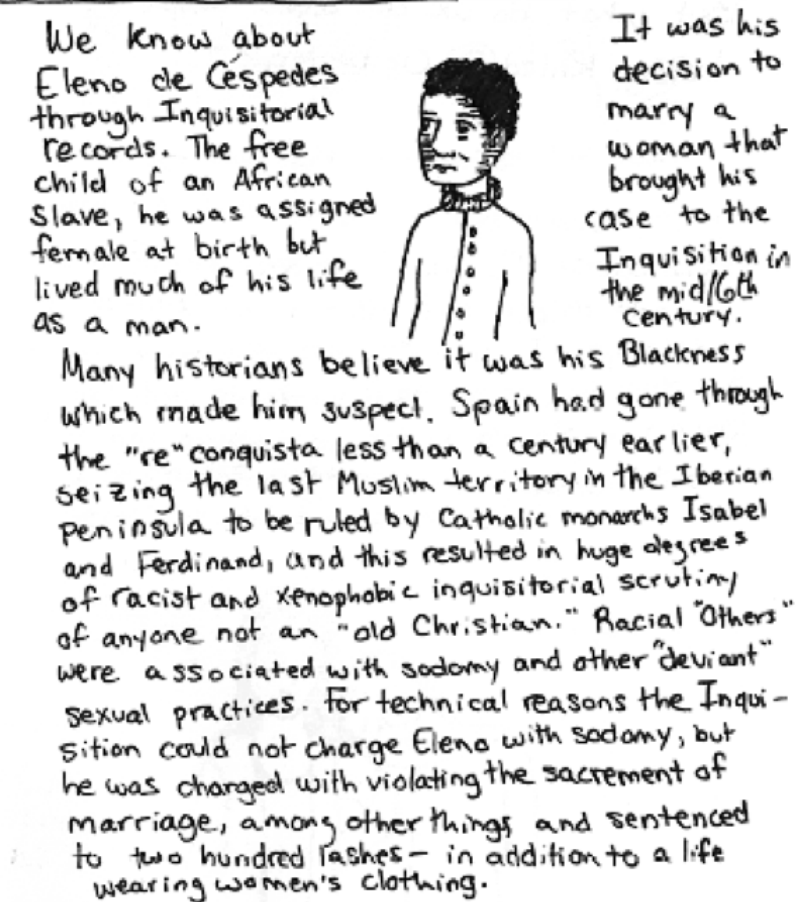
"Ben" (3.5 years) was, however, in some ways more femme than me. Okay, I still don't really understand what femme means. But he was more aesthetically thoughtful, he was more considerate of other people, he was more detail-oriented. I was a sloppy, smelly mess next to him. A lot of the stuff I said above about envying straightmanfriendship came into play in my relationship with Ben – sure, we had great sex, but the main highlight was how fucking rad our friendship was. I've never been that close with anyone in my life, never felt so fully understood and accepted. I did still feel a little pang of wanting to date women, but seriously, what's gender next to that feeling of being understood?

I think dating Ben also made me realize that being a cisstraightman was not all it was cracked up to be, and made me let go a little bit of that ideal I'd had in my mind. We helped each other figure out what it meant to have a healthy friendship, a healthy relationship, the whole deal, and I felt less trapped by gender than I had in my whole life before that.

What has been my experience with other queers while dating men?

My relationship with Ben was a healthy & good thing, but queer women especially have tended to shit all over it, before and after we broke up.

I understand that to some extent – I usually think that any man my friends date isn't good enough for them – but it also makes me feel more distant from my friends when it feels like they've made me into this idea of a queer woman and Ben* into this idea of a straight cis man, and are basing their responses off of that. Instead of being comforting, it makes me feel like our friendship is more superficial, based off our shared queer identity instead of our individual selves. I fall into the same trap, though, so I'm not trying to guilt anyone.



It's also a rejection of assumed heterosexuality. Totally absent from the November Rule is any discussion of whether to refrain from asking out someone with a history of dating men. This is a big deal to me, given the frequent assumptions of heterosexuality I encounter as a femme despite a lot of queer signaling on my part.



Part of this is obviously straight-up misogyny. The idea is that women must exist to fulfill male desires.

But sometimes it comes from queer women. And I get it, but I try not to replicate it. Instead, when asking someone out, I try to remember women's college culture.

Instead of asking
Are you queer?
or
Are you straight

I try to
just ask
people out.

Because, as a straight-reading person who often dates men, I often question my own status as queer.

How do you experience your queer community?

It's been pretty wonderful coming back into the queer community. I was on the edges of it during the years that I was in a relationship, partly because it was a restraighntionship and didn't want to seem like a poser, like I was pretending to be queer to get attention but then going back to my safe heteronormative relationship.

I've mostly lost my embarrassment over that, and I've completely lost patience for that attitude from others. Whatever, bisexuality exists, and I'm not going to fall over myself justifying it. Straight feelings happened, they'll probably happen again. On the other hand, it's hard for me to feel too self-satisfied about that, because I know it's so much easier being able to pass for straight, being able to do a straight relationship. I realize that that contradicts what I said at the top of the paragraph, but that's how it goes – I have my emotional response, which is frustration, but I also understand the other side of not wanting to have the queer community tokenized. What I absolutely can't stand is when that attitude comes from straight people, who are so bamboozled that I could go from dating women to men to women to menn to women and men. So bamboozled. For the most part, the queer community here has been lovely, and only shitty in the way that any group of people is always going to be shitty.



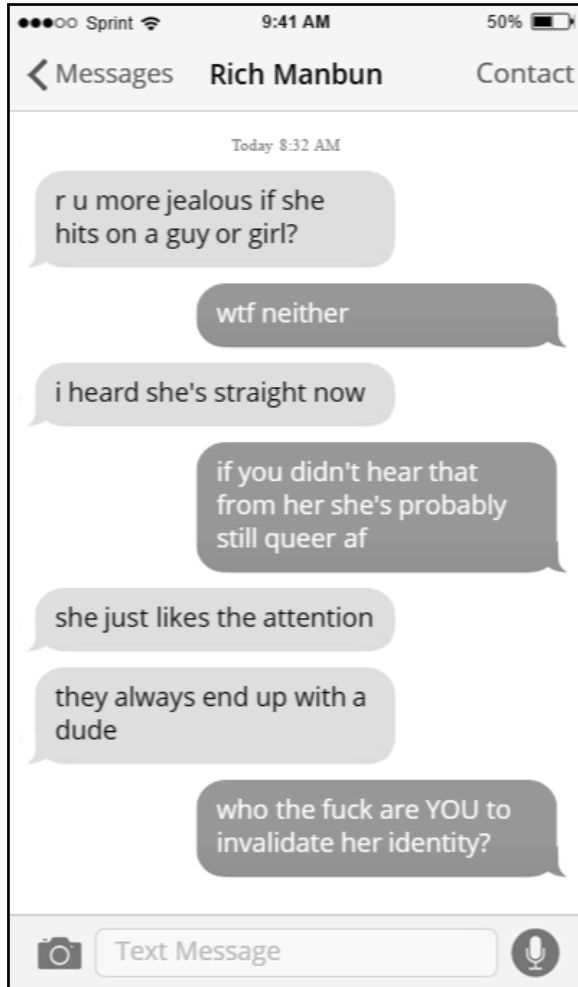
But love it or hate it — and there are good reasons to hate it — the November rule says a lot about the culture of women's colleges.



The November Rule recognizes the power differential between an out upperclasswoman and a firstie who isn't out. It acknowledges the potential for oppression both outside the queer community and within it. It operates under the philosophy that we should look out for one another, an act of resistance against a destructive heterosexual "battle of the sexes" model for relationships.







Ursula: Yeah. I'm also thinking even if I wasn't trans and you didn't have that either... I mean, maybe I wouldn't be queer then. But like, if people are queer, maybe their bodies are queer bodies, even if they're cisnormative.

Katy: Right.. do you think that's true?

Ursula: Probably. I mean, they're queers, right? So they must have queer bodies. I guess maybe their body isn't what makes them queer, but maybe it is. Who knows what makes them queer? I don't know.

Katy: Some people think they know why people are queer. And that's why they feel they have this ground to stand on to say who isn't.

Ursula: I think people experience different levels of oppression and have different experiences, but if you're too worried about whether or not people are using a word then you aren't thinking about what is actually happening. That's so identity. Why do you..? People are dying! Which is true. I mean, the world is fucked up. So why are you worried about who's calling themselves queer? Just because people have the same word for themselves doesn't mean they have the same experience.

Katy: Mmm. Well, so here's another question, then, because you and I obviously face different oppressions and different levels of violence or risk for violence, and you live in Philadelphia which is one of the cities in the US where transgender women are murdered at the highest rate. And so, how do you... how do you reconcile that with when you and I use the same identity term? If your use of that term shows or is related to this position that you're in that is much more dangerous than the one that I'm in?

Ursula: I mean, I'm a trans woman, but, all of the trans women that are getting killed are women of color. There's been a couple white trans women who have died but they killed themselves. So, I don't feel the danger for me is all that – it's not that dire. It's chronic and exhausting but I don't really feel too in danger. I feel united with you, using that identity. I think about how I've heard Bash Back uses the framework of being a constellation of queer identities. It's about being an outsider. It's not about being a nation. So, yeah. We don't have to form an alliance with clear membership cards and yadda yadda; my goal would be that we would attack heteropatriarchy to destroy it, not to replace it with a new sexual system in which there's some kind of rigid rules. We all have a vested interest in expansion and destruction.





Feh Muh Nist

SAY. IT. WITH. ME.

Femmes aren't less queer because they are femme

Femmes aren't less queer because they date men

Butches aren't inherently more queer than femmes

Butches can have bi / pansexual invisibility too


Passing doesn't make you less queer


Not passing doesn't necessarily make you more political, radical, or queer

Queers can have gender presentation acceptable to the dominant culture

The flipside of passing for ciswomen can be bi-erasure and/or femme invisibility

Like · Comment · 48 minutes ago · 🌐

 32 like this.



Write a comment ...

of queer question your queer identity?

Ursula: I don't think I let that happen... because, I can't stand certain people and certain things that I read online. I just like – it's hard – I will read, on the internet at least, I will read some bullshit. I don't know why I do it to myself. I get myself all worked up, but I can't – it's so disruptive for me. So, no, I don't. Because I will not be around someone doing that.

Katy: So, I have an interesting question for you, then, because part of what I'm hearing from what you're talking about, with your experience of queerness, is that.. regardless of the content of your relationships – you're saying you are having relationships that are heteronormative, and regardless of the content of that, you walk through the world in such a way where you are harassed, where you are the subject of queer harassment, and so, of course you're queer. And it doesn't have to do with whether or not your relationships are queer – which you don't seem to have a clear answer for, whether or not they are – but the fact that you experience this harassment, like, obviously this is an identity that you hold.

Ursula: Yeah. I think I have a queer body.

Katy: Okay, and your body. Yeah. Well, so I have a little bit of an experience that kind of mirrors that in a different way, where the way that my queerness is invisible means that I'm not the subject of queer harassment very often. And especially if I'm dating a man, it just reads as a straight relationship, and I read as a straight person. Regardless of whether or not that's true. And, so, some of the people that I've talked to about this, one of the things that they come back to when they feel complicated about people like me claiming the term queer is the fact that I don't always experience this harassment. That I have this selective access to heteronormativity in a way that allows me to walk underneath it. And so, I guess I don't have a specific question. I'm just juxtaposing your experience, which is, I'm harassed and so I'm queer, or, I'm harassed and that's evidence of me being queer, and my experience which is, I'm not harassed, and so I feel obligated to furnish constant evidence that I am queer. And then also, in the moments when – it's not that I'm never harassed – in the moments when that harassment is absent because I'm being read in the world as straight, then there's this other question, or it's a question that other people ask me, which is where is the evidence that you're queer? And then there's the question that I ask myself. Is that I am intrinsically queer? Is it that my relationships are queer? Is it that the sex I'm having is queer? Like, which part of this is queer? And what does it mean to be queer? And so how do I prove to other people that I'm queer?

Ursula: I don't know for myself, I don't know... There's so many different pressures on the way that I do gender, and stuff, but I definitely have a queer body.

Katy: Yeah. I mean, I think I have a queer body too but in a way that other people don't know because of my chronic illness. Because if I don't take medicine my body produces really serious amounts of testosterone and not enough estrogen. Which is why you and I take the same medicine... right? But that's not something, like, even if I get undressed people don't see that.

Katy: They are heteronormative – not even that they’re being read as heteronormative. It’s that they are heteronormative.

Ursula: They are heteronormative, yeah, but they might also be queer, because materially they can’t be but they are trying to mirror heterosexuality. They definitely are heteronormative. I had this interesting thing where actually, when I heard about this zine project, I realized that my thoughts had been closed minded. But for a while I was definitely like, wow, it’s so interesting to be a trans woman because I have this experience of – let me actually tell you a story before I tell you this.

Katy: Okay.

Ursula: I used to see this really terrible dude, and he was seeing this other trans woman, and he was talking about Grindr – actually he was telling me first how the “LGBT community” is really promiscuous. And I was like, fuck you, what the fuck are you talking about. He was talking about how he went on Grindr and the other girl he was seeing would get, like, 100 messages within an hour or a day or something.

[Laughter.]

Katy: Those are two really different – like an hour vs. a day? That’s like... really different... 2,400 messages a day.

[Laughter.]

Ursula: Yeah, I don’t know, but I was like, that’s complicated, obviously. I’m also thinking right now, are all the people messaging her LGBT? Just because someone’s messaging you doesn’t mean you’re having sex with them. And also, like, I get way more messages after transitioning than I do before. I think women in general get way more messages from men than gay men actually give each other. One thing I think is funny and that I always look for opportunities to share is that I get approached or harassed – I mean, I don’t really consider it harassment in a gay bar setting – just on the street after transitioning, I am more likely to have a man start talking to me in a suggestive way than I was as a gay man in a gay bar. It’s really fascinating. And bad. What am I talking about?

Katy: So you were seeing this guy..

Ursula: I was seeing this guy, and he was talking about how LGBT people are more promiscuous, and I remember thinking, oh it’s so interesting, I am LGBT but he is not. At that time I was like, wow, as a trans woman I have this really fascinating experience of being an LGBT person and dating someone who isn’t LGBT. And then you made this zine call and I was like, what is my problem? I forget about bisexual people. But I’m not bisexual. Or not really heteroflexible, or whatever.

Katy: Do you ever have experiences where other people that fall under the umbrella term

CONVERSATION #1

ANNA & KATY CLARK

Katy: Anna, did you see the post I put on facebook about the zine I am compiling submissions for? About the broad topic of when queer identified people have relationships that are or are viewed as heteronormative? This seems like something you have feelings about and in part has stemmed from our conversations. I would love it if you would consider writing something!

Anna: Babe!!!! So nice to hear from you! Yes I did see your post, it sounds like a really great idea!

Katy: Will you please write something? I want to make sure I represent a variety of perspectives including those of people who have very different experiences of this than I do!

Anna: I thought about it but I won’t participate... I think I changed my opinion quite a bit. I’m actually really not proud (the opposite rather), of what I said to you back then...

Katy: Ohh, what? That is so interesting! I wish we could talk more about this. The things that you said to me, people say to me all the time, and actually sometimes I see that there are important and valid points there, after all there is a difference in visibility and then how one receives privileged access or harassment...

Anna: Hmm... But I also think it’s not so cool to tell you these things.. One of my current housemates is bi. And I talked with her a lot. And yes, with some of her partners she won’t get street harassment. But even when she dates hetcis dudes, she’s still bi. Not sometimes straight and sometimes gay.. You know? And a lover of mine started doing sex work, with cis dudes, and she was also worried for a bit she wasn’t ‘really’ gay anymore. What’s my point? I think it doesn’t really make sense to say who has more or less privilege. And being queer doesn’t just depend on who you fuck. Does this make sense?

Katy: Yep, it makes a lot of sense to me! I started to think more about this too, and I do think that it’s worth asking ourselves broader questions about what queer means and what purpose a queer identity serves and what we all need from each other in the queer community. Like I know when other queers start to talk shit about how many men I have dated I start to feel like my queer identity is under threat of not being recognized or validated, and for me that queer identity serves a lot of purposes, including bringing me into connection with both friends and lovers of similar minds, and also signaling things about my gender identity and sexual politics and situating me in juxtaposition to a heteronormativity that I never truly feel welcomed into, even when dating cis dudes, because of my own stuff about gender identity and sex drive and chronic illness, etc.

So what I need is for other queers to recognize that identity that I have and understand its validity. But when other people see me identify as queer but have a relationship that many would read as straight, sometimes I wonder if maybe they feel like their queer identity is under threat, because even though I agree with what you said, it is still true that there is a difference between walking through the world in a way where you are always coming out because you will never be mistaken for straight, and walking through the world and being mistaken for straight. Not that that brings no burdens of its own, but it totally is a different experience. And so do people who are always visible feel a need to be able to distinguish between those two experiences?

Anna: Yes I do see that point.. I think for me sometimes it’s important to acknowledge that it’s a different experience, as you just described. Maybe just that living a queer sexuality is different for different people (duh!). And that each experience comes with different forms of oppression... I guess also that, because of these different ways of fucking, I do feel some kind of mutual understanding with people who share my kind of desires.. And of course that doesn’t mean those relatings or friendships are better, when there is mutual understanding. But maybe there can never be mutual understanding, because we all have different experiences in the world... But that’s a whole different zine! :)

Katy: That all makes sense. Is it okay if I talk about you in the zine? (To describe how having these sorts of conversations with you has helped expand my understanding of the topic and see where other people are coming from.)

Anna: Actually I was thinking you could just publish our conversation!

Katy: Do they know?

Ursula: I don’t think so. I think a lot of them identify as straight. Some of them are bisexual. I’ve dated a lot of bisexual men.

Katy: Does the way that they identify influence how respected or seen you feel in your gender identity?

Ursula: Yeah. If men consider themselves bisexual, I have more concern about it. I definitely remember being with this one boy and he referred to my genitals with he/him pronouns, and I was like, “Oh, interesting, you think that these are, you think that this thing here is a boy?” And he was like, “Oh, well, I don’t know, is it a girl?” And I was like, fascinating! And I was lying there for a minute and I was like, I asked him point blank, “Do you think of me as a woman?” And he always used my correct pronouns and stuff, I think he literally said – I mean, he’s clueless – I think he was literally like, “I think of you as a tranny, like, it’s different, you know?” He would make comments like that I’m the “best of both worlds” and weird shit like that. I’m like... “Not really...” *[Laughter.]*

Katy: So when the people that you date are straight men, that reaffirms or confirms that you are seen in your gender identity by the person you are dating?

Ursula: Yeah, I’m less worried about it. But I also wonder if they are not straight, too. I’ve never talked to a man who was like, “I’m not interested in trans women,” who was also being respectful. I really have no idea; I assume that that’s a large portion of the population, but most of the time they say something transphobic which actually invalidates their argument. Cause I’m like, you aren’t able to tell me your honest preferences, all I can hear is that you’re transphobic and won’t be with a trans woman but that doesn’t tell me what your genuine sexuality is; all that tells me is that there’s something that would prevent you... But there’s a growing consensus that – and who knows if it’s right or if it’s just what’s gonna happen for right now – that there’s a corresponding... this is weird I guess. As a trans woman who dates men there seems to be a corresponding group of men. I think there is some diversity in that group of how, specifically, they describe their sexuality and probably how, specifically, they experience their sexuality. So some of them do seem to be bisexual and some of them do seem to be heterosexual.

Katy: Do you call those relationships queer relationships? Or how would you describe the relationships that you have when you date men? And how does it depend on their sexuality or not?

Ursula: I don’t know... Yeah, I don’t know.

Katy: Do you ever feel like the relationships that you’re in get read as heteronormative ones?

Ursula: Yeah, they’re definitely heteronormative.

language of gayness to target me, so I was targeted with transmisogyny, like you're a girl, you do things like a girl. And then kids had the language of gayness, and told me that I was gay. In a lot of ways, being gay has implications about being effeminate or being feminine or trans, because it literally means, like, being happy, which is this idea that you're light on your feet, and you're a fairy, and that's about there being a spectrum and an inexorable connection between these identities that are somehow supposed to be separate now because GLSEN says that gender and sexuality are not related or something. But I remember for a long time someone talking about how, historically, people used to talk about people being an invert, and I remember thinking, "Oh, that really resonates with me."

The other change in harassment is after transitioning. Usually, people are generally really kind of kind... They're sort of kind. *[Laughter.]* People come up to me all the time and say things that are supposed to be positive, but it's kind of exhausting and annoying to have people be like, "Wow, you're beautiful," or saying things you know aren't true. I literally, at the trans march, had some cis woman say, "You're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen," which is like, *[laughter]*, "Okay." It's weird, it makes you kind of crazy to always have people be like, "Wow, you're so beautiful." I don't know why people say that. Why it's important for them to say that to you. There's benefits to it too, people immediately feel like they can relate to me, like if someone is gay they automatically see me as an ally. Women, I guess, feel not threatened by me, probably, but also feel like they can bond with me or something. People are really warm and kind to me in a way that's different since transition. [...] People are saying, "Hey," to you all the time. I never know what people who say hey to me are thinking, about whether or not I'm cis or trans or whatever. Before transitioning – it probably still happens about the same amount – before transitioning I experienced this queer street harassment which is like, depending on what I'd wear, usually, often times there were comments about my clothing being feminine.

I remember walking down South University in Ann Arbor and wearing this cabled, long cardigan. And I'm in the street, and I'm jaywalking, and these two frat bros in football jerseys walked by and literally bumped into me and were like – I don't know what they said – they said, "Nice sweater, faggot," or something like that. The only time, I might have been in transition, but I was going to work so I was dressed androgynously or whatever, I was on 6th st in South Philly. I was wearing some cut off, short-short jeans. I was facing away from the road and this car of dudes pulled up with their windows down, they said, like, "Nice shorts, bro." and then they said, "No, seriously, where'd you get 'em? I want some." and so I just didn't turn around, and then they were like... "FAGGOT!" and then they drove off. And that's really intense. That's hard for me to brush off. But after transition that's still, I mean I guess people would say, like, "Oh, that's a man." The gendered-sexual street harassment is just all the time. Less terrifying but it's still scary. And so, that changes my relationship to being queer. Or the way that the harassment works.

Katy: So, when you date dudes, are they straight dudes?

Ursula: I don't know.

HANNAH R. CARL

My first girlfriend, from when I was 17, recently sent me a message (because obviously we're still friends because lesbians, duh) written by someone bisexual expressing frustration about the "misconception...that bi people are half straight half gay." She sent it thinking I would agree. I didn't. I don't. I mean, I'm sure the person who wrote that feels that way and that is completely valid. But I actually do experience my sexuality as either straight or gay. And a big reason for this is because bisexuality is not a visible identity in the way straightness or gayness are. If I walk down the street with a woman, people assume lesbian. If I walk down the street with a man, people assume straight girl. (Though if we're being completely honest, as a femme, sometimes people still assume straight girl even when I am very clearly on a date with another visibly gay lady. I will forever be a little bit in love with the woman who told off the dude trying to hit on me while she and I were on a date.)

It takes a lot to form an identity – including how we feel we are being perceived by the outside world. We all know that scene in season 4 of the L word during the basketball game (such a good scene – Jenny drinking coffee in the middle of the court? Perf) when Tina says she still identifies as a lesbian, and Jenny goes off on her about how she gave up that identity when she walks down the street holding hands with a man and is afforded all the privileges of being heterosexual. So – they're both right. Tina loves ladies. She's shared beds with them, and has a child with one. But, at that point in time, she didn't live a life as a lesbian outside of her own conception of herself.

And this is very much how I feel. It's Pride this weekend in NYC and it's one of my favorite times of year. I've been listening to Tegan and Sara and Peaches and I brought out my rainbow flag and I'm definitely gonna grind up on some womyn at the Dyke March After Party tonight (with consent, obvi). But I'm straight passing. And the last person I dated was a cisgender man, and he's not the first and he probably won't be the last. There are not a lot of times that my lesbian identity is something I can wear. And being able to wear it feels like owning it. And that is super important for those of us who have been marginalized.

Sometimes I feel like I don't get to experience my lesbian identity as much as I want to, because it isn't visible.

My longest relationship was a lesbian relationship. I have published stories and poems about being in love with women; they're out there in the world. I snuck out of bed at night in high school to watch the Logo channel with the volume turned way down. I've read every Michelle Tea book. I came out to my parents and my brothers. When I want to come out to people I'm meeting, I feel like it requires an explanation. If I mention an ex-girlfriend, I want to mention an ex-boyfriend too, or vise versa, or qualify my story by saying I date men and women and in between and beyond so my identity doesn't get cut in half.

But this is what queerness is, right? It's complex and it's a celebration of that complexity.

No matter who I’m fucking, or walking down the street with, or making morning-after pancakes with, I will always have my ex-girlfriend’s vintage Levi’s western hanging up in my closet, and my ex-girlfriend teaching herself Fire Door by Ani on the guitar will always be the most romantic thing anyone has done for me, and I will always want to bone any girl in a snapback, and I will always feel proud of my queer identity, even when it isn’t visible.

I was really little. And I remember I was friends with girls and they’d be like, “He wants to be a girl! Whatever! It’s not a problem!” when I was, like, four. So it was pretty direct transmisogyny when I was very young. Then, when kids got older and they started to know that there’s this thing called being gay, it switched to people sort of in a negative way saying that I was gay when I was a child and not actually experiencing full on sexuality, or there was no indication to me that I was gay. I remember kids bringing pornography, and I don’t remember the images of the pornography, but it was either an intersex or a transgender person. I remember thinking the website was called bitch.com or something like that. And people were like, “Oh my god, a hermaphrodite!”

Katy: Wait, how old were you at this time?

Ursula: This was probably somewhere between third and fifth grade, and I was living in Iowa City at the time. And I remember – it must have been fourth grade, because I remember it played out for a while – and I remember being interested in it and reflecting on it and having a fascination with the idea that people can be intersex. And then wondering if I was intersex, for a long time. And then also I learned about these things called transsexuals. And I sort of thought I was being transgressive and think I thought of myself as an ally and was like, “Well, I’m gonna get a sex change,” when I was little. Anyway. I knew that was interesting and maybe a little later or something I remember my friend talking about how there are people who – “It’s a fact.” – they are actually boys trapped in girl’s bodies and girls trapped in boy’s bodies. And I was like... “Really?” And they were like, “Yeah!” That definitely did not resonate. I was not like, “Oh, that’s me,” because I have a full understanding of the situation. I mean, I think I do. My analysis hasn’t changed that much. I definitely when I was younger was like, there’s no actual difference between boys and girls. Like this is all made up. It doesn’t matter. That was really important to me. I remember the same friend who was telling me there are boys who are trapped in girl’s bodies and girls who are trapped in boy’s bodies telling me that men died before women and that that was just, like, well known and a fact. And statistically, that is true. But for some reason it caused me all this dysphoria and dread. I can’t believe that not only do I have to be a boy, I have to die first. I was so mad.

[Laughter.]

Ursula: But what else about harassment and time? The question was about how does it also relate to the word queer, right?

Katy: Right, because what I heard you say before is that there was a point in time when you were using the term gay to describe yourself, but then you were like, wait a second, there’s something more going on here in terms of why I’m being harassed. I’m being harassed for being effeminate, and what I’m getting is actually transmisogyny, and so calling myself gay doesn’t encapsulate that? But calling myself queer might? That’s part of what I heard you say, I don’t know if I got it right.

Ursula: That is what I’m saying. So earlier on, it was definitely like kids didn’t have the

Katy: Do you want to talk at all about your relationship to the term queer? Like, what it means to you, do you use it, when did you start using it, why do you use it?

Ursula: Yeah, sure. So, I started using it because – my understanding has consistently been the same, I think – that queer is about being... I started off with a gay identity and queer meant there’s something else to it. It meant embracing transgression against an entire sexual hierarchical system. It includes components of gender and of sexuality. I remember sort of liberal lines about gay politics being like “I should be able to marry whoever I want,” or “Who I sleep with is my business!” or something like that. And I remember being like, I’m not a man who sleeps with men, you know?

Katy: Right, right.

Ursula: Yeah! And that’s not the reason that I’m targeted for harassment. I’m targeted because of a misogynistic system for my femininity, my inability to be masculine. And that’s connected to my gayness. So it’s a double-bind, really; I think that you can be a hypermasculine gay man, and then you are only dealing with the fact that people – maybe people use the idea that you’re connected to people that might be feminine, like they use that transmisogyny against you even though it’s obviously not what’s going on for you. But mostly, it’s the idea that maybe you’re promiscuous, or you’re disgusting, or maybe you’re just sort of like, you’re demonic or especially sinful or twisted. Which, I feel like I experienced that, but I also experienced the misogyny. It’s weird to disentangle those and they usually come at you together and trap you.

Katy: So do you connect your relationship to the term queer with ways you experience harassment? Like is there a direct relationship for you there?

Ursula: Yeah.

Katy: Can you say more about how... I mean, so, I imagine that the ways you are harassed change depending on how you present in the world throughout your life... is that accurate?

Ursula: Yeah, it is.

Katy: Like if you compare how you’re harassed now to how you were harassed as a sixteen year old.

Ursula: Oh. Yeah.

Katy: So, how do you follow the changes in the way you were harassed with your relationship with the term queer?

Ursula: So, in childhood, I don’t really remember anyone turning to me and being like, “You’re gay,” although I’m sure if you talk to my parents, people would remember those things – it definitely happened. But I definitely remember being told, “You’re a girl!” when

EMILY BERRY

Hello all,

So first off, thanks for takin’ the time to read this zine, as it is an important conversation for us all to be having within our communities. Okay, so to begin I wanna use Merriam Webster to define the word “queer.” I understand specific preferences for other dictionaries but I’m working with what I got.

Queer

- 1. a: worthless, counterfeit
b: questionable, suspicious
- 2. a: differing in some odd way from what is usual or normal
b: 1) eccentric, unconventional.
2) mildly insane: touched
c: absorbed or interested to an extreme or unreasonable degree: obsessed
d: *often disparaging + offensive*
1) sexually attracted to members of the same sex: homosexual, gay.
2) of, relating to, or used by homosexuals: gay.

3. a: not quite well

Wow, spot on there Merriam Webster, spot on.

So most of these definitions are not how I hear or use the word queer. Which tells me that we’re in a transitional state with this and as a community we’re redefining what it means to be queer. Whether or not the dictionaries catch up, we’ll see.

It’s a pretty terrible task, to rewrite a definition that is so based on individual perception. For me it is much more than being gay or a lesbian or bi. It holds much more depth, and is more flexible; it’s not fixed, non binary. It’s however the fuck you identify if you don’t feel like straight, bi, gay, or lesbian fit.

I’ve been queer my whole life. When I was a very young child, until a few years before my period started, I identified as a boy. Now I identify as a woman, as well as there being a major part of me that honors my younger self and recognizes the masculine in me. I use she/her pronouns, with the exception of the handful of strangers that use he/him pronouns for me, and I really like that.

I have never been in a relationship that was not obviously queer, aside from people who assume we’re just friends. Many of my friends are queer femmes, and many folks that I’ve dated are too. All with different histories or currently dating cis, straight men. It’s

quite unfortunate how many stories I’ve heard of why they don’t feel a part of the queer community. A major part of this is because the “you’re not queer enough” attitude, which is fucked.

Let me just take this time to make an announcement to all the queers who are perceived as queer, who identify as queer and who are only in queer relationships: FUCK THE YOU’RE NOT QUEER ENOUGH ATTITUDE. That is the biggest thing I need from my queer community, is to drop the snobby, elitist bogus and be more inclusive. It’s extremely rude to exclude people in this way and is also very invalidating, which is something as queers we often get from the straight community, why do it to ourselves?

From my limited perspective and with what I have experienced with this, men who are bi or queer and participate in hetero relationships do not get the same kind of attitude. If this is a broader issue than just what I’ve noticed, and it’s many people’s experience, then we need to do some serious re-examining of how deep the patriarchy runs in our conditioning and how we can unlearn that shit.

With all this being said, it is also crucial for queer femmes in hetero relationships to recognize their privilege, and utilize it appropriately. By simply recognizing that in many settings it’s easier for you to get a job, have general respect in the public’s eye, to travel to many places both in the U.S. as well as other countries with less/different harassment (this one is certainly a tricky subject because just being a woman traveling, you get a lot of harassment, but traveling as a straight couple can be a very nice security blanket). Even simple things like not feeling totally isolated when around a bunch of straight people all the time, straight media, straight advertising...

As for privileges that I have as a queer person who doesn’t date cis men or people that can get me pregnant, that is a huge stress factor that I never have. I also have the luxury of having no attraction to shitty dudes. Not that woman are always great by any means; I am just glad to have a serious lack of sympathy for shitty cis dudes.

It’s important for people to date who they want. Diversity is a good thing, let’s remember that. If we’re trying to be sex positive, we can start by not excluding queer femmes who date cis men. Lets share space: trusting, safe space where we don’t shame. Gender is a fetish, don’t yuck their yum.

URSULA

AS INTERVIEWED BY KATY CLARK

Katy: Okay, tell me what makes you nervous about what I just said in the car. Because that’s important, right?

Ursula: Yeah, well, I’m nervous because I’m worried... I mean, I’ve had conversations about whether or not trans women are queer if they date men. And before transitioning, I remember having this conversation with this trans woman where she was telling me about how she’s not queer. And I was like... really confused about it. And we were sort of at an impasse and I was like, okay, well, I’m queer, and I’m a trans woman, and I’m going to transition, and I’m still gonna be queer.

Katy: Right. So, what I said in the car, you’re talking about when I said that sometimes people say things that make me angry. Like when they say I’m not queer because I’ve had sex with a man. That made you nervous.

Ursula: Yeah.

Katy: Did it make you nervous because you feel worried that you’re gonna say something that’s gonna make me mad?

Ursula: No!

Katy: Or it brings up feelings within you that you can connect to?

Ursula: Yeah, it brings up feelings that I can connect to. Not because people are like, “You’re not queer.” But people think that trans women are reactionary and trying to assimilate. Or, that even though for me it is what it is to be trans, they think that you don’t want to be gender nonconforming anymore, or something. I think that’s what some people think.

Katy: You’re talking about how some people think that trans people that transition are reifying gender. Is that what you’re talking about?

Ursula: Uh-huh. Yeah.

Katy: That perpetual idea that if you want to be part of [gender], then that’s somehow wrong.

Ursula: Yeah.

and escapable. In other examples, I’m not so attached to what is concrete and palpable. I generally have a lot of room and acceptance for what is slippery. Perhaps it is because of how concretely I experience queerness that I struggle with the slippery nature of queer in/visibility. My queerness is entirely informed by just how concrete, static, and visible my version of it manifests. Most days, I can accept the contradictions through an acceptance of slipperiness, but I so often feel like I’m being asked to undermine my own concrete experiences so that femmes can feel validated in their identity, and I don’t feel willing to do that. I’m okay with femmes not doing that for me if they can get comfortable with and accepting of the friction too.

BETHANY ANNE

Hi ya’ll, my name is Bethany. This is my experience as a queer cis woman who has had romantic relationships mostly with men.

I get included in all the traditions women are expected to be involved in and rarely included in the traditions men are. I get included in conversations about old recipes with elder women and people tell me not to lift heavy things, for example. You probably wouldn’t guess I am queer unless you had a working gaydar. But I am; I really, really am. I see queerness as a playful honesty in the face of a world polluted with the convenience of binary thought patterns, this or that mentalities. A playful honesty about who I am moment to moment and who I love in all those moments.

It’s the freedom for me to do me. Sometimes when I am in queer spaces, though, I feel un-included or unwanted for not being queer enough. This pushes me towards straighter crowds where I do feel included. In these straight spaces, like with my family, all those aspects of myself that society expects from a woman get reinforced and thus a feedback loop begins where I become more acceptable to some straighter people and less accepted by the queer community and therefore less able to explore the possibilities of my personality and sexuality. Also, I love being with other queers, it’s inspiring!

So! Join me in creating a community of folks who help each other develop themselves into whatever beautiful dang butterflies they wanna be!

Love, Bethany Anne

CONVERSATION #2

DEBBIE PUMARADA, DEVIN MICHAEL LEATHERMAN, & KATY CLARK

[Note: this conversation makes reference to three people - Amber, Ursula, and Leah (M.) - whose roles may not be obvious to the reader who does not find themselves part of this micro-community. The references are used to ground the conversation had here in real experiences, and the editorial decision has been made to leave these references in tact, so that the reader may connect what is said here to other pieces in this zine, in which each of these three characters speak for themselves.]

Katy: So the prompts brought up racial themes for you?

Debbie: Yeah, because there's also the thing where I very clearly and easily pass as white, because I am white, but I'm Puerto Rican white. I don't have all the same experiences as normal white people, but at the same time, I definitely don't have the experiences of people of color. So I don't know which space to be in, because I don't feel like I should be in a white space, because I don't identify as just a white person; but I also don't necessarily feel like I belong in spaces with people of color because I'm not outwardly a person of color, so I know I'm not going to share in a lot of the same experiences and I don't want to pretend like I do. But at the same time, I have been put in situations where I'm hearing white people talk about Latinos in a negative way. Generally white people feel really comfortable saying things around me that they wouldn't feel comfortable with saying around a Latina person who is more outwardly Latina looking.

Devin: So earlier, we were talking about space and you looking really queer in a nonqueer, predominantly white environment. This is part of why I wanted to interview you, because we had talked about being racially ambiguous. You brought up the punk community and looking queer. Do you feel like your experiences with race make you want to defend people in the queer community who don't always pass for queer or who pass for straight? We're talking about a phenomenon of people passing as straight within the queer community and what that means and the implications of it. So how do you think race plays into that? Especially as someone who does a lot of edge work, or is working on the edge. I have that same lens. I'm always thinking about the edge of things, the edge of race, the edge of society. I'm third culture, so I'm thinking about my military upbringing; I've always been fascinated by the edge of things.

Debbie: So, I'm dating a cis man right now and I have been for a long time.

Devin: Oh, that's interesting!

Debbie: Right! So there have been times in my life when I am super straight passing;

femaleness, but queerness... and not just queerness, but butch queerness. One exception ("baby" at the party store) ends up being a welcome respite from the usual harassment that feels more immediately violent to me. Maybe that's part of what makes it hard to watch ex lovers go to cis men after me. I have a hard time understanding how she could be drawn to the people most violent to me in the same way she was drawn to me. It feels painful. Like with all cis men, I will have to start on the assumption that her new date is potentially dangerous to me and he'll have to earn anything better. The other exception is that they might try to bro out with me over women, an assumption I don't appreciate and also don't interpret as a privilege of masculinity, but a toxicity of it. It's even something I've experienced from the new lovers of ex lovers, whether they be cis men or other queer women.

I've never known a butch dyke to be equally okay with a femme lover moving on to a cis man as another dyke. I suspect that those who insist they are equally okay have to do some work to reel it in. There's something reinforcing about it... it prods at a wound I think exists to varying degrees in all masculine women, that their masculinity is less desirable than cis male masculinity. I take a perverse pleasure in watching a cis man get turned down in favor of a butch dyke, but the opposite scenario twists a knife. My masculinity often gets packaged up with the same masculinity as cis men, as if instability and precariousness manifests the same across masculinities. Indeed, mine is precarious at moments, but it feels like a substantially different weight and texture for cis masculinity to threaten female masculinity than for cis masculinity to be threatened by itself or by femininity. I don't understand how she could be drawn to both him and me because I so strongly dislike being a woman – much less a butch dyke – in the presence of cis masculinity and I feel so little of the kinship to it that femmes often draw between me and them. But my attraction is more specific and pointed than femmes who date multiple masculinities. I date multiple femininities, but that feels like a very different multiplicity because inherent power seems to shift less dramatically across femininity.

Queer escapes definition, and I concede that even as someone who desperately wants to deny it identitarian definition, thereby defining it. If queerness is anything, it is nothing, and I don't experience my queerness as something empty. It escapes clear application on people, which is perhaps why we are supposed to accept what another tells us about their very self. This all means that certain versions of queerness will rub up against other versions in uncomfortable ways, and I'm mostly okay with that. I'm comfortable with the friction...comfortable saying that my queerness and your queerness do weird things to each other, and shrugging and leaving it at that. The exception seems to be that I can't tolerate a femme telling me I have it easier, but that still comes down to the denial of something very concrete to me, unlike how I interpret identity. Queers feel undermined by each other's identities all the time, and I think I generally escape that feeling because I attach my queerness to fucking and externalization more than essential truth of the self, and fucking just can't be undermined in the same way identity can because of its concreteness. I also escape the need for identity because my queerness is never denied... it's too visible to deny it. I think femmes need identity in a way I don't. There's a lot of push and pull in this for me, often between the personal and political, and the concrete

women. If you need to be seen as queer, it seems you need to be seen next to someone who makes you read queer by proxy. I don't know any other way to increase your visibility, because it seems a lot to ask of a world of cishet strangers to read you as queer without any physical or externalized or observable characteristics that mark you as queer in the dominant imagination. But I get how much that disagrees with a range of desire and attraction. That being said, femme is a queer word. I would never use it to describe heterosexual femininity and might even find it appropriative to do so. I think there is a queer femme aesthetic that other queers are often able to tune into that femmes don't always realize is palpable. But how I feel personally about queer femmes who date cis men isn't about how I feel about femmes so much as cis masculinity and the desirability of my own masculinity. There's a disconnect between the personal and political. It changes day to day and hour to hour and it's something that is always reforming for me as someone who wants to be responsive to the women I date: femmes.

I feel frustrated by what seems like a contest between mascs and femmes for the title of more oppressed. I don't experience my masculinity as the privilege femmes sometimes want to position it as. My major privilege of being recognizable to other queers is also what makes it most dangerous for me to walk around in the world. For every moment femmes yearn to be seen, there's a moment I desperately need to disappear. I think it's probably hard to walk around the world as a femme, and I think they're tough as nails for it. But I'm not sure where it got into anyone's head that it's any easier to be a butch dyke. The truth is that femmes disappear even further when they walk around in public with men, and I understand that disappearance is hard, but I'm often the reason they experience queer-motivated harassment when they do...it's because they're standing next to me, and the explicitly queer harassment is usually directed at me, while the sexual harassment imbued with desire is usually directed at her. That's messy because it's a dangerous and unwelcome desire motivated by power, but it's hard for me to read it without an element of attraction that I never experience from cis men.

There's a party store down the street from me and the men who work there call every woman "baby," including me. Femmes tend to send me in alone because they hate being called that, but as someone who is rarely seen as desirable to men, I experience a strange appreciation for it. Usually, the attention I receive from cis men is an astute observation of "dyke" made audible out the window of a moving vehicle. I always know it's spring time, not when the trees turn green and the flowers bloom, but when the slurs fly. When I'm threatened with rape, it's always a threat to rape me *straight*. Sexual harassment in the form of a comparatively benign "baby" starts to seem like a welcome compliment when your desirability is sort of niche, fetishized on the rare occasions cis men admit to desiring masc women, and when attention otherwise feels explicitly dangerous. There are days I don't want to (and sometimes don't) leave my apartment because it feels too hard to be seen, and I am always seen. Femmes tell me all the time that I experience privilege through my masculinity in the way cis men relate to me. They insist that cis men must listen to me in a way they'd never listen to femmes, but I self-select out of most relationships with cis men because I experience them similarly to femmes. If I'm not fielding their condescension and mansplaining, I'm usually being explicitly and violently harassed on the basis of not just

that was one of the things that I felt a lot more comfortable [with] when I moved back to Michigan, was just coming into myself as a queer person, so now I look more and more queer. Which is also really awkward, because then I'm like, "Yeah, but I'm dating a guy," but then people look at me like, "Why are you pretending to be queer?"

Devin: Was he into all the changes?

Debbie: He has been; I think all his long term relationships have been with queer women.

Devin: Oh, okay, see, now people like that, I've always considered queer

Katy: Why? The men?

Devin: It's one of those things where I'm around them and I give them my internal queer card or queer pass, they end up in my queer space, and that's where you and Amber fall too.

Katy: You put us in the same space as the men that we date.

Devin: What? Yeah. And her boyfriends. Like Amber's boyfriends I often –

Katy: So why are we the same level of queer as the men that we date?

Devin: Wait, what?

Katy: You just said that in your mind, Amber and I occupy the same queer space as people like [my ex-boyfriend] or [Debbie's] boyfriend.

Devin: Oh, no, no, okay, sorry, I'm mincing words. People like that end up in my head in the queer community. But I might not say out loud, "That person's queer," or if they tried to speak for the queer community, I'd be like, "Nobody ever told you that." You know, it's one of those things.

[Laughter.]

Devin: But I think there's room for that. There's some people I talk to that are more against people being in the queer community who are like, "No, there can't be queer straight people." And I do make room for that, but I'm also really hesitant to this wave of people coming into the queer community and what it means. The fact that our local Pride was recently completely run by people who are predominantly in straight relationships, have not –

Debbie: Really? I thought that –

Devin: There were a lot of people who were very vocal – my piece kind of talks about it –

who end up in roles where they run things. One person didn't know who Donna Summer and Sylvester were, but they were, like, running a Pride and I'm like, how? How does this happen? Your cultural – you are culturally removed. And a lot of them are like, ex-queers. People who were part of a queer community ten years ago and now sort of elevated to, like, business-owner and now mostly hang out with other white, straight business-owners.

Katy: So what is the hesitation to name these people and keep it on the record?

Devin: I'll think about it.

Katy: I'm just curious if you can explore that more, though. Why is your instinct to edit?

Devin: Because when I brought it up, you felt insinuated into that, but I don't consider you those people. But it's really hard to mark those people.

Katy: Right. I still don't understand how you differentiate

Devin: Well, it's just experienced based. There are shared experiences, like, if you're functioning against straight norms often enough so that they become visible to you. If your life brings you into the conscious awareness of hetero-public-hegemonic-straight, like, family style stuff. There's a thing that happens. It's the way people talk about virginity, like you can tell it in someone's eyes. You can see in someone's eyes sometimes when you're having a conversation with them whether or not they've seen straight hegemony, and so that's why there are some straight male partners who predominantly date queer people, who I automatically feel are queer because somehow, functionally, they've become aware of the strictures of – they start to question power dynamics within their own relationship and I can see them negotiating power dynamics between us, because they realize the nuance. Okay so there's that, but then there's also culturally queer. So someone can be culturally very queer, and just in straight relationships, and that becomes very confusing, because now there's a culture. So now there's people who function at a certain cultural level of queerness. So there's plenty of straight friends of queer people who are very queer culturally, they know all the references.

Katy: Right, people who [grew up] in a queer culture but are straight themselves.

Devin: Yeah, so, we listen to the same music, we talk about the same things, and then it gets confusing because you're like, who are you?

Katy: It's interesting also to me, Debbie, that you – I think you said earlier, that at least a little while ago, a number of years ago – you felt like you were straight passing in your appearance. Because the first time I met you, I read you as a lesbian.

Debbie: Oh!

Katy: You like walked into Treefort Bikes and I was like, "Welcome, lesbian, to the shop

WEIRD, QUEER BAGGAGE

BY LEAH M.

When I'm asked to define queer, I'm usually adamant that queer isn't about who we *are*, but what we *do*. Around 1869, "homosexuality" is coined and incorporated into modern psychiatry's vocabulary. Suddenly, it becomes possible to declare that one is homosexual, rather than simply that they do something that is against sexual mores. It becomes diagnostic, essential, intrinsic, a capital "T" Truth (and incidentally, it becomes something we can make eugenic efforts to breed out). Eventually, the diagnosis seems to become internalized and embraced – pride. Today, we know it better as identity, or at least that's what the diagnosis seems to have evolved into: something truthful and imposed to something truthful and embraced. I'm comfortable with identities forming around what we do, and identity formation and declaration is important in finding each other and building community, but I'm not so comfortable with identities being born into us and I have a hard time calling someone queer who never acts on it. I don't know what the latency period is, but after a certain period of remission from queer sex, I admit that I'll often silently stop reading you as queer. I don't doubt the queerness of femmes who also date cis men, but that doesn't make it queer when cis women and cis men fuck each other. I don't think a queer identity makes everything we do queer. It's unlikely anyone would ever read me or the sex I have as anything but queer, but that doesn't make the bacon and eggs I ate this morning queer and it doesn't queer the DTE bill I paid.

My political feelings around this are buried in my insistence that queer is about the body and desire, not the soul... in my frustration that queers aren't fucking anymore, just seeking identitarian validation and marriage licenses. I didn't start hearing words like demisexual or sapiosexual until I started college at 22 years old. The words that seem most about the soul are college to me and they don't sit well within my working class values that persist even as a college student with a comfy full-time paycheck. I can't imagine the first thing I need someone to know about my sexuality is that I'm attracted to intellectual capacity first, probably because I can't imagine you are walking around the world experiencing violence because of the nature of that attraction. Is anyone declaring sapiosexuality anywhere but on college campuses? Is it anything but a currency? Sapiosexuality interacts with my class values like unsolicited nutritional advice or dating profiles that require a college degree or "some direction in life." I'm sometimes dismayed that I no longer seem to know how to talk about queerness without the college vocabulary, but it's the vocabulary that I turn to when I am trying to challenge my knee jerk reactions that are initiated by weird queer emotional baggage. It's how I try to come back down to earth when I'm feeling something I find politically stupid to feel (like emasculation) because I can use it to form trajectories that are less directed by weird, queer, emotional baggage, but I avoid as much identitarian language as possible, and it isn't always possible. When femmes ask their queer identity be validated even as they fuck and date cis men, I find myself wondering how much validation they require when they fuck and date other queer

of my male friends did not want to come to a party we were hosting because because he didn't "want to be the only one who hadn't slept with Kim." It was around this time that we stopped hanging around people who were not polyamorous or queer or kinky.

In November of 2016, I broke up with a long term, serious, non-primary partner who was a cis man. This freed up a lot of time and space in my life, and I started to date again. This time I tried to stay away from cis men. I worked up enough courage to actually go out with folks who weren't men. From this point I realized that I was pretty done with straight, cis men for a while.

Now I know that I feel more comfortable in queer spaces than in straight ones because I feel like I can be myself, learn and listen to other queer folks, and also share my own experiences without feeling judged. While discussing this zine article with a partner, they said, "I would rather hang out with queer people who might judge me for not being queer enough than straight people who don't understand the queer experience at all."

I definitely feel like I am still not queer enough because I don't know a lot about lesbian pop culture (I have only recently seen the first season of the L-word, which was something I was told that I should watch), and I have primarily dated cis men until recently. I have never dated a woman monogamously, and while being polyamorous, my primary relationship has never been with a woman (I don't do hierarchical polyamory anymore, so I no longer have any primaries). I think sharing similar experiences makes you feel like you belong more to the group you share those experiences with.

I am still not out to my parents or extended family, but my friends and sisters know. Not being out as queer and polyamorous means that I have never introduced any partners as partners to my parents besides my long term primary partner who I am no longer with. This seems unfair to my non cis men partners. I don't know how to tell my parents that I am polyamorous and queer, and not sure which one will be worse to come out as to them.

I think if you do not fit inside of heteronormative guidelines, you are queer. I know that there are not point values for "how queer" you are. It's not like you start off at 1 Queer, and when you hit 10 Queer, you are finally queer enough. Queer is not a unit of measurement.

However, knowing all of this, I still struggle with believing that I am actually queer enough. I don't actually know what it would mean to be queer enough, and so I don't think I would know it when the moment arrived. I experience this problem with thinking that I don't "work hard enough" or am "smart enough" or "good enough." I think that I will need to internalize what queer means to me, so that someday I will feel queer enough.

where I am the only woman that works here," you know?

Debbie: *[Laughs.]*

Katy: That was how I instantly read you and that was, like, years ago.

Debbie: It was more a disguise that I put on when I was living in Puerto Rico because I didn't have a queer community or a punk community where I felt like I could be myself comfortably. When I moved back from Puerto Rico, for a little while I still dressed and had my long hair and still looked pretty straight. My mom was super happy about it. And then the winter came and I brought out my layers, brought out my hoodies, and stuff like that, and then I started playing bike polo. There's a lot of people in bike polo. It's very masculine centric and has a whole lot of straight people. But there's a lot of queer-looking women because it's a lot of people who came from punk communities and that lead me eventually to roller derby where there are so many queer women and –

Devin: – and punk women.

Debbie: Yeah, and punk women, and it was like, oh, so many. It really let me feel a lot more comfortable in who I was, in expressing myself in the ways that I felt were more at home for me versus going out of my way to be like, "Is this pretty?" Yeah, I don't know, I feel like when I was passing as straight, it was more of a defense mechanism than me being myself. I feel a lot more comfortable with myself, presenting like this. I feel a lot more - like for some reason, after I shaved my head, I was like, "Wow! I'm actually pretty," because it's always been, "Wow, you have such beautiful hair. You have such golden brown, long, soft, thick hair," and I'm just like, "Fuck it!" It's gone! *[Laughs.]* So, I don't know, but then now I feel like I'm so queer passing, that being in a straight relationship is like – I don't know what the word is - like cheating on my queerness? But I don't know. I don't know how to come to terms with that. Because I don't feel like – well, I know that the gender of my partner does not factor into how attracted I am to them and I don't feel like it should. But I feel like people still think that it should. There's still a lot of bisexual erasure and a lot of people who identify as lesbians thinking that people who identify as pansexual or bisexual are going to leave them for somebody of the "other gender" because they "miss it" and it just kind of – I don't know – it just kind of sucks.

Katy: I have a question: were you dating Laura at the same time that you were dating Matt?

Debbie: I was, at first. But Matt and I were really on the rocks, so we ended up breaking up and then it was just me and Laura and she and I broke up because we were – sadly – we really liked each other but we were sexually incompatible because I don't have a libido. And that's another thing that I struggle with. And now, after she and I split up, Matt and I kind of.. something about having so much space between us brought us back together?

Katy: We should come back to the libido question because I'm very curious about that. But

the reason why I ask that is because I wonder, you know, one of the things that you spoke about is reading as so queer and then being in a relationship with a cis dude; did the way that you felt about that and the feelings that you sort of had about maybe cheating in some way on your queer identity or the way that you're being read in the world as queer, did that shift at all when you were also dating a woman at the same time?

Debbie: When I was out with her, I felt really validated in my identity. I was like, “Look, look at me! I look like a lesbian and I’m dating a woman.”

[Laughter.]

Debbie: I’m checking all the right boxes right now. So that was nice, but then it made it extra hard when I started feeling feelings for Matt again. It was like, I thought that I had figured out what was wrong, like I thought that the reason why it wasn’t working with him was because I liked women, but now here I am having feelings for him again. I had started dating somebody [before Laura] while I was still with Matt – because we’re open, not because I was cheating on him and lying about it – she ended up breaking up with me because she wasn’t comfortable with an open relationship, but as she was breaking up with me, she was telling me that she knew that I was actually a lesbian and that I was going to figure out one day that I was actually a lesbian and just, like, completely denying that somebody who looks as queer as me and likes women could possibly have a more broad gender interest. And so for a moment I thought, oh, maybe she was right. And it kind of – on the one hand I really like occupying the queer space and being pan and just being me and not having to be in a box, but on the other hand it’s kind of nice being in a box. Because you’re like, this is me, and I fit into this box, and it all makes sense and it’s easy to explain. It’s not as complex and it doesn’t intersect with everything in the whole world. But that’s not me. That’s not who I am. In the long run, I was not able to pretend like that is who I was, just like I wasn’t able to pretend that I was a straight and straight passing woman. Like as soon as I came to Michigan it was just like, oh my god, just take these layers of costume off and get back to being me.

Devin: At the risk of opening up another can of worms, it’s really interesting that there is this generation of lesbians who almost use an essentialist rhetoric. Cause you’re “born this way,” all of this stuff, and this idea of a partner being like, “You are a lesbian and you’re just going to realize you’re a lesbian,” as if you were already something. When lesbianism and the whole rhetoric around lesbianism was the first identity that was predominantly a political position. So, like, –

Katy: Lesbian separatism.

Devin: Yeah, like lesbianism of post Stonewall was all about identifying and making the political choice to become –

Katy: Not to have sex with men.

Three and a half years into our relationship, we decided to open up. This was due to a lot of reasons, but it was primarily because we both realized that one could be in love with multiple people and we wanted to allow ourselves to have that experience.

I knew that eventually I wanted to go on a date with a girl, but didn’t know if/when that would happen. Then, I started going on dates with a girl I met at a polyamorous party. I also participated in kink scenes with women. However, as we continued our journey in open relationships, I only dated one woman. Most of my partners were cis men. I had one genderqueer partner who used he/him pronouns. I was too afraid to try to date other women.

Several months into this, my friend told me, “Kim, you know, since you are dating a girl, you can identify as queer, right?” This completely blew my mind. At 24 years old, is it possible to not be straight anymore? Should I really be allowed to call myself queer? What did that even really mean?

I had considered myself to be straight my whole life, and I didn’t feel like I was part of the LGBTQ acronym. I had primarily dated men, and had always crushed on men. I had very few instances where I felt sexually attracted to women up until this point. To me, I should not have been allowed to use any kind of identifier besides straight. I had a very specific idea in my head about what queer meant, and I didn’t fit it. Queer people experienced discrimination, had difficult times in high school figuring out their sexuality, got kicked out of their families if they came out to them, were bullied in school, lost friends. I fit well into heteronormative spaces.

I couldn’t picture myself being anything but straight. I never identified as pansexual or bisexual, or anything besides just straight. But I was dating a woman, and I am a woman. However, my primary relationship was with a man. At the time, bisexual to me meant that I was 50% interested in men and 50% interested in women. And that was not true for me. I was still mostly just attracted to men. Some days I felt more attracted to women, but I was still mostly interested in men. I didn’t really understand what pansexuality was. And I thought you had to be gay, bi, or trans to be QUEER. I wasn’t gay enough to be queer.

I used the label “not straight” to describe myself for a really long time. It is only in the last year and a half that I have started to identify as queer. This is because I felt like bi and pan still were not descriptive enough for what I was feeling. I still mostly had cis men partners, I was only dating one woman, and I had not had many sexual experiences with non cis men, even though I found that I was more and more attracted to people who were not straight cis men. I tried going on one date with a woman in 2015, but we just turned into friends because both of us were too nervous about trying to date. I wasn’t “gay enough” to be bisexual or pansexual.

I finally felt that queer was the best descriptor for me, because I knew I wasn’t straight, but I didn’t really know what else to call me. I think I started using queer when I realized that I started to not fit in well with my heteronormative friends. I had an experience where one

was actually not straight. Also I was still attracted to boys, so I couldn't be ACTUALLY gay – right?

My junior year people in my class started coming out as bisexual, but someone told me that it meant they were actually gay but were not ready to say that. Bisexuality is not real. You could only be gay or straight. I had a couple of friends who came out as bisexual, and that didn't change anything about how I felt about them. By my senior year, I had no problem about homosexuality, agreed with legal marriage, but just thought they should not be married in the church.

My first year of college, my randomly placed college roommate decided that we should watch *Queer as Folk* together. She and her friends watched a bunch of queer media in high school, and she wanted to share it with me. Looking back, even though I know this show depicts a very specific type of queerness (white, gay, cis men who are at least middle class), it started the process of me learning about some kind of gay culture. I learned that gay people couldn't have their loved ones visit them in the hospital. I learned how many benefits marriage provided heterosexual couples that were not accessible to gay couples. I learned about the struggles of a gay couple having children and how AIDS impacted families. This specific type of queerness was made familiar to me, and changed my perspective on everything I had ever thought about gayness. By the end of the year, we were watching QAF in our underwear in her bed, with our neighbors asking why their was moaning being blasted from our dorm room. The lesbian sex scenes in this show made me really uncomfortable, though.

My third year of college I had a sex dream about my chemistry study friend, who was a woman. This was my first sex dream I had ever had. This was terrifying and uncomfortable for me to experience, and I had to continuing seeing this friend after this dream. I didn't tell anyone about this until years later. College started my political transformation, but it definitely wasn't the end of it.

I started dating a man soon after this dream in college, and we came to graduate school together. During this time I started learning more in-depth about racism, classism, queerness, sexual fluidity, and gender fluidity. I had a more diverse group of friends – lesbians, gay men, genderqueer folks, feminists, leftists. I knew a couple where one person was a lesbian and one person was bisexual. One of my best friends was a gay man, and he talked to me a lot about his experiences. I became even more familiar with some queerness.

I think this probably is going to sound really silly, but watching *Orange is the New Black* awakened some kind of something inside of me. While binge watching Season 1, I realized that I was really attracted to people in the show, and really into the queer sex scenes. I was specifically very into Alex, and thought sexual things about her character, and realized I wanted to have sexual experiences with women. I think the biggest deal is that I allowed myself to feel things for the women in the show. I was in love with and still dating this man, so I decided that if we were to break up, I would attempt to date women then.

Devin: Not to have sex with men. And then also these – I do know a generation of younger lesbians who are lesbians and may even have a political stake in it, because they talk to me in gay spaces, like when I worked at the gay bar, about, like, “Yeah, I am a lesbian and I really like being with women, but I watch this type of porn, with only men,” like, “I only watch gay bukkake porn.”

Debbie: *[Laughs.]*

Devin: “But I only actually wanna be in a sexual scenario with a woman.” So there is a level of political choice but then it's still also wrapped up in – I don't know, I'm just always surprised when I hear self-identified, culturally lesbian lesbians, not just, like, homosexual women, but people who – and then using this political rhetoric at the end of your relationship, using this essentialist, “You are already a lesbian.” That you haven't realized you're a lesbian.

Debbie: That was a big part of why it made me so uncomfortable; it was like she was telling me who I was. And I didn't have any control over who I was. I mean, I don't necessarily think I have any control over who I am. I am who I am. But I can't even put into words how uncomfortable it made me. I think it was the erasure of that other part of my identity.

Devin: I think queerness really took a lot from that political choice conversation that lesbians had, really opened it up, and then going back into our conversation, it gets more confusing, because I need to allow space for people to choose to become politically queer, then, to some extent, whose socialization may have been predominantly as a straight person.

Katy: Can you tell me more about how you use the term ‘straight socialized?’ Cause, are we not all straight socialized? Like, were you straight socialized?

Devin: Well, I was resocialized as a gay man. And I've always been socialized as effeminate, like I realized that I say sorry because I was a young, effeminate boy, always. That's where there is an essential part of my identity that is effeminate; I'll use the term effeminate, and then queer, and then gay. Those all got lumped on top of [eachother]. It really started as effeminate, like an effeminate five year old.

Katy: Effeminate, then queer, then gay?

Devin: No, then gay because –

Katy: Effeminate, then gay, then queer.

Devin: Yeah, it's effeminate, then gay because, one, everyone tells you you're gay -

Katy: That is exactly what Ursula described!

Devin: And two, you're an effeminate man, and not only am I attracted to men, but because of the way gender roles play out, you just end up gay because you're effeminate, so therefore you identify with the women in your life, therefore you end up attracted to men. And then the queerness comes after that when you come to consciousness of this whole thing. So yes, we are all straight socialized, but I was resocialized as gay. And especially if it's part of your formative – like to me, there's a major gap between people who “chose” – who came into a queer consciousness as an adult, having already gone through the process of becoming themselves, of becoming –

Katy: And what is that difference to you?

Devin: Going through high school being marked, not being able to have – not having my first date until way later. Every milestone was hit – I'm still hitting milestones people hit in their early twenties, you know, and I'm almost thirty. I have always felt stunted; I still feel like a high schooler.

Katy: Do you think that people that don't realize that they're not heterosexual until later in life maybe also feel stunted in a similar way? And that those milestones come even further for them?

Devin: That's why I do want to have these conversations, because I feel like there's an area of insensitivity that I have where I just don't notice or sense something that I'm sure is there, because I am so always in the face of my own identity; it's like a big monster that is just always in the way of me seeing other people's relationship to this thing. But yeah, I think there is a layer of stunting. But I'm really still that angsty teenager and it's really hard for me to give over and be like, “Oh yeah, it's so hard for you.” My ex-boyfriend had the same girlfriend up until his first year of college, you know, and got to have this kind of great experience as, like, a “normal person.” And then when he came out, his family structures shifted but they were all in tact. Cause you have more agency. My whole relationship with my whole family is fucked up because my parents didn't take it well – you know? I didn't talk to certain family members for years even though they were probably okay with it because [of] stigma. You're navigating all of this stuff as a human with no agency. You're a child. That changes the way you perceive yourself and you perceive your place in the world so radically. So for someone to be able to just step into it later and be like, “Oh, okay, I have time for this now...?” Or “Oh, this is something I'm discovering and I'm learning about it,” and for it to be something that I've had to discover and learn about because I was already marked by something else – you know? For me it was a tool for getting out of a dangerous situation where I was just an effeminate man getting beat up. Oh, if I'm gay I can find this group of people.

Debbie: You can find a home.

Devin: Yeah but then you find all this poisonous rhetoric too, where you're like, “Ew, vaginas, ew, oh my god,” you know? “I just wanna go drink Absolut vodka and drive my Subaru and move to a city.” You find all this rhetoric and then you find queer to sort of dis-

ARE YOU ASSOCIATED WITH THE PRIDE PARADE? // QUEER IS NOT A UNIT OF MEASUREMENT

BY KIM DALEY

A few weeks ago I went to a conference with my lab. My labmate asked me on the drive, “Kim, I have heard some things. We TOTALLY don't have to talk about it if it is not relevant. But if it is relevant, maybe we can talk about it? I was wondering... are you associated with the Pride Parade?”

After a few seconds of awkward silence, I tried to figure out what exactly I should respond with. I have come out to a couple of my labmates, but specifically not him. Also we were going to be trapped in the car together for several more hours.

“What? Are you asking me if I am queer?”

“I don't know what queer means, but if it is part of the LGBTQ thing, then yes. Is that what the Q stands for?”

I am the oldest sibling, raised in a politically conservative, Roman Catholic household. No sex before marriage, no boys allowed in my bedroom, we went to church every Sunday, and being gay meant you were going to hell. Victim blaming was common, I went to pro-life marches in D.C., and I did not agree with gay marriage. I never voted for Obama. My mom did not like it when queer people held hands in public because they should “keep that to themselves.” My dad yelled at us for watching Degrassi: The Next Generation when he saw two boys kiss on the screen. He wanted us to watch more “wholesome” television. My parents taught us that homosexuality was a revolting lifestyle. The first time I encountered gay people was when I was in middle school. My best friend's aunt was a lesbian, and her and her partner adopted more than five children together. I had weird feelings about being around them. It made me think that lesbians were older, white, butch women.

My freshman year, I learned that my friend from marching band was probably a lesbian, which was information that was confusing for me. She was cool! And wasn't trying to date me. So, there really wasn't anything wrong with gay people, except that their sexual actions were a sin? After meeting her, I think that it normalized queerness more for me and it wasn't as foreign. At one point after this, I caught myself looking and girl's butts in the locker room and thought I was a lesbian. The thought made me so uncomfortable because I thought I would be disowned and sent to hell. It would change everything about my life if I

there,” and afraid of, like –

Debbie: So different.

Devin: there’s a different layer to it, and I can’t get across, and it’s really fucking isolating. And I feel constantly like I’m self isolating, because I can’t give someone my number. And you could. And at the very least, if you gave someone your number and they weren’t interested, they would just throw it away. But I risk, by giving them my number, them keeping it, and showing it to all their friends, and it becoming a joke. So, I have been in situations with this phenomenon of women or friends in relationships with men where I’ve been like, “Oh, man, your boyfriend’s really hot,” you know, “That’s cool.” And then they’re like, “Oh, maybe you can do something with him,” because they’re pushing him to explore. As if just having sex with a straight or masculine man will fulfill this desire when I’m out here, like, chronically single. Like, they’re throwing me a bone, as if I’m a dog. Because they are like, “It will affirm my queer identity if I’m in a relationship with a queer person so will you just become queer.”

Katy: Yeah. Well, I definitely am a person that can sometimes fall into that category. If I’m dating a man, not that I would try to force queerness on a partner that isn’t queer, but I’ve definitely been in the position where, when I’m getting to know someone, if I see something that I read as a spark of queerness in them, I’m like, “Ooh!” Like, “Let’s explore this!”

[Laughter.]

Katy: Like, I’m very excited about this, if this person who identifies as straight is really into getting – wants me to put lots of things in their butt or something, I’m like, “Yes!!!”

[Laughter.]

Katy: Like, this is queer; this is something that I experience as queer being brought in, like if I can strap it on and peg a boyfriend, I’m like *[claps]*, “Thank you!”

illusion yourself.

Katy: So when you say straight socialized, you’re speaking about people whose formative years are lived under the blanket of a straight identity?

Devin: Yeah, and who are really able to step into it. I can’t come up with a term, I don’t think straight socialized is perfect.

Katy: Right.

Devin: But I don’t like just saying, I don’t like calling people women. I don’t really like the term femmes as a coverall, though, instead of using women; and then women & femmes – by the time I’m saying women and femmes who pass as straight and are predominantly in – are they heterosexual relationships? – are in relationships with – and now I’m gendering their partners too? Like I don’t know [Debbie’s] partner! I know you described him as a cis man but he might walk in and I might read him as gay, he might be waify and effeminate and the stereotype of a queer, or he could walk in and be a big, burly, super straight passing dude who doesn’t even have any consciousness of himself as a queer, who is just really into queer babes. You know? Now I’m starting to gender two or three people in my labeling of this phenomenon, and it’s just not, it no longer – it doesn’t operate, but the phenomenon exists, so.

Katy: Right, so how do we talk about it?

Devin: How do we talk about it? It doesn’t even matter, I am so annoyed that sex has anything to do with it, too, which is something we need to talk about, with the libido. Because I’m really also interested in how I forgot to really be incorporative of asexuals in this conversation, and there’s lots of asexuals who pass as straight who need space in the queer community and can’t find it.

Debbie: Mhm. Well, what’s interesting about what you were just talking about in terms of high school and all of that – the first time I slept with a woman was in my like 29, 30? So, I didn’t hit a lot of those milestones until late twenties, early thirties, but yet, my highschool years were not – they weren’t great. I didn’t have any friends, I had a lot of depression. I guess being punk kind of queered me before actually coming out as queer, but you’re treated differently because they know there’s just something about you that’s just not fitting into their... On the one hand, I feel like I am part of those people you were talking about, because I was dating men and I was straight and so straight socialized in a lot of ways, but still, I don’t think that if you are queer, just coming out later doesn’t afford you as much privilege as it seems like it does, just because you’re coming out later. It probably does for some people but I don’t think it does for everyone, especially probably trans people.

Devin: So this conversation is interesting because we’re having it in Ypsi. And my place in it is skewed. I’m going to college right now in a Women’s Studies program. So I’m dealing with this phenomenon in two radically different ways: there’s like Ypsi Pride and this group

of sort of upper, older, white women, assumedly, who pass as straight and are sort of like, in a better class position than I am. That are sort of rubbing elbows with the mayor, and all of this. And sort of becoming mouth pieces for the queer community in certain ways where I think they try to make room for the full spectrum of LGBT folks and queers, but, the phenomenon is really bizarre. And then groups of younger people who are more of our generation that are in college, who are in droves all of a sudden making the political decision to be queer. And then that becomes confusing, because they're trying to forge a queer identity, figure themselves out, but then they're also – you know, we're in so many discussion based situations in our classes where it's like, "Well I'm queer..." and I'm like, "You have been queer for five minutes, sit the fuck down." And then I'm coming from this space where – I do really want to allow – I've always made space for queer straight people even. I'm interested in having that conversation. But, now there's this new phenomenon that if I just leave that door wide open in another area of my life – I'm in this other space where there is a desire to gain epistemic privilege. And the political choice, it's almost like performative allyship. Becoming queer – making the political decision to become queer and exploring queerness as an option – which I think everyone should do – they're basically saying, "Yes, this idea that everyone might be queer or of a queer futurism or queer utopia is great, and so I think queers do have a better status, and so I should – it is oppressive for me to only date men." You know? But then, two weeks later, they've sort of taken it on as this burden that they've never really lived, in order to take part in conversations.

Debbie: It's like they're trying to act and perform in this role so that they get victim points?

Devin: A little bit. But then I can see on the other hand where I'm seeing that because I'm a bitter, old queen. I'm more interested in if you're becoming a mouthpiece – if people are making you a mouthpiece or if you're really stepping into that role quite happily as a mouthpiece for the queer community, and your experience is so shallow with it? And I'm not talking about sex either, I don't think sex makes you queer.

Debbie: Right, I don't either.

Devin: So I feel weird because I'm basically saying, "You need to get experience, you need to go out and date!" There's like a quota of this many humans and genitalia that you have to like, meet. No, it's not that. It's that you have to live outside of these sort of structures. And, do you have to know cultural stuff? I've met people who are super queer who don't, you know, listen to Gravy Train, or fucking listen to queer music, or aren't part of a queer community, but are super queer because they're LGBT but not LGBT, like not consumer sponsored, consumerist, capital G gay.

Debbie: What you were saying about political queerness, that was actually another part – I guess there's a lot of reasons why I didn't come into my identity until so much later in life. I had begun to think of myself as queer – well I thought of myself as bi, not as queer – when I was in high school. But then since I kept dating men, I wasn't sure if it was a performative thing where I was saying that I'm bi because I'm in the punk community and there's a bunch of LGBT people in the punk community and I'm just trying to fit in; is that what I'm

[Laughter.]

Devin: I don't wanna ask you about your partner's experience because he didn't agree to this interview, but I do want to ask you about how you two, amongst yourselves, experience that relationship – I don't know whether you guys talk about it or not.

Debbie: Well, I will say, I guess this is a point I didn't come to when we were talking about the libido stuff. Matt has been the absolute most understanding person in terms of my libido. If I don't want sex, he does not pressure me in any way. If he's gotta go do his thing, he goes and does his thing. He's never made me feel guilty. He has never – I mean he does feel insecure sometimes, when he's like, "Do you still like me or not?" But he believes me when I tell him that I do versus being like, "Oh, you won't have sex with me, so you don't want me." And that was part of the reason why things with Laura ended so quickly, was because in her feeling insecure about it, it automatically brought me back to my previous relationships where I was forced to perform sexually because it was this assumed duty that I had. And I was just not in any way willing to put myself back in the position of making myself have sex that I didn't wanna have. And now being in a relationship where I am never put into the position of performing that role, where I am only expected to have sex when I want to have sex, I am no longer willing to put myself back in that position because it just feels so terrible.

Devin: And a man is facilitating that in opposition to a woman, in your specific case.

Katy: There was one other thing that I thought of that I just wanted to put on the record. I guess a question that you asked me made me think about – when I do date straight, cis dudes, I do feel the need to shift my gender presentation in some ways, and it's more important to me that my partner reads me as non-normative. Because there's something intrinsically non-normative about a queer relationship, where I feel able to fully embrace a femme presentation and embrace femininity, but in a relationship that's being read as straight, that even my partner might read as straight, that's when it becomes very important to me to clarify and to be very clear. Like, this is not what you think it is. I am not the woman that you think that I am.

Devin: So as someone who is attracted to masculine men, and then I have these queer friends who can attain them, and I can't and that kind of upsets me – that's one of the reasons why I do have an antagonistic relationship with certain people. Because they can attain something that I can't. Like, I wish that I could walk down the street – no, see, that's where it gets fucked up. I don't wish that I could walk down the street and be assaulted. Obviously. And I don't wish that for you. But it is frustrating that you can theoretically walk into a bar and strike up a conversation with a dude and hopefully safely find a partner. And I can't, because I risk a different kind of violence, and I get really emotional about it right now, even thinking about it. And then that translates even in gay spaces; that fear's still there. You know everyone's gay, but you're so socialized to not flirt with people. Because you're so taught, "Don't do that," because you're putting yourself out there. And then my straight friends will be like, "What, everybody feels afraid of putting themselves out

[Laughter.]

Devin: I mean, I'm not the queerest queer person! But I am – my queerness is keeping me from seeing a very real truth in your experience, Katy, of having an innate queerness that I can't see.

Katy: Sure.

Devin: Do you ever feel the need, like want to [pass as more queer]?

Katy: Yeah, sometimes. For me it's really complicated by my experience of gender. Because I – the medicine that I take for a chronic illness feminizes my body. This is [part of] why I look femme. Like I don't have the same access to tools to perform androgyny that other people have.

Devin: But what if you just wore coveralls and cut your hair?

Katy: Sometimes I do change the way that I dress intentionally to be read as more queer, but I also don't feel interested in – I feel most interested in wearing whatever feels the least like a costume. And most of the time that means presenting as femme.

Devin: That makes sense. Also, Debbie, I had a weird experience where I used to be way more queeny, and it got to the point where I was performing a lot of gender fuckery; I was dressing way different than I do now, essentially, like, verging up on genderqueer, but not quite. I was thinking about transitioning and now I'm like, no, I'm totally a dude; I just wanna be a dude with a beard and dirty shorts. And still be, effectively, a queen. But the thing that really sparked it was, that in order to perform queeniness, or queerness, a lot of times I had to perform white queerness. So in order to perform myself authentically, I was like, well, the gay Latinos that I know all wear flat bill caps – even the queeny guys – because flat bill caps are, like, urban or brown. And so there in that world of Latino-ness, straight men do hold the space of creating that culture's reference points. So flat bill caps are the only thing that's available because there aren't queens that are creating... so you do have very effeminate men wearing flat bill caps but then the skinny jeans instead of baggy jeans, you know? Like the Maricón Collective and maricón [the Spanish word for 'faggot'] culture became my reference point which reads more butch if I go to a bar. I read like a top. And then that just gets confusing, or I look like a masc dude, unless you look really close. But now I have this buzz cut which I feel like racializes me – without the buzz cut I look less Latino. I feel like it makes me feel like I look like myself. But it's always butch reference points. If I want to look the race that I am, or if I want to adopt the style of my queer Latino siblings, I usually have to use a butcher aesthetic. Which I find very bizarre. I mean I guess could shave off my eyebrows and then draw them on and just adopt female Latina culture, but that would be a lot.

Debbie: Yeah, you don't really have to do that.

doing? Because I haven't actually dated any women; like I know that I'm attracted to them, but that was for a long time why I didn't explore that identity and why I didn't identify with it openly was because I didn't feel like it was my place as a person who dated men, or boys, at that time.

Devin: Do you think there is an inherent queerness to being mixed and do you think there's an inherent – if you're queer, do you think you have a different relationship to race? Like even white, queer people, do you think they have a different relationship to race than nonqueer people?

Debbie: Well I think that adding a queer layer, when you're already a minority, makes... On the one hand I think it makes it easier for you to understand issues because you're dealing with similar issues in different spaces in your life. But it also makes it really hard to find that community that you identify with, because, when I was in Puerto Rico I was like, alright well now I'm Puerto Rican and I can't be queer. You want to feel safe, and you want to feel like you have a community, so you kind of put those things away. I feel like that's something that queer people of color end up having to do a lot, or queer minorities, because you either – for me, it's really easy for me to find queer friends, and it's pretty easy for me to find Puerto Rican friends, but to find queer, Latino friends is so hard. And it bums me out. Because I don't feel like my experience is – I don't feel like I have any close friends who share my experience fully. Like I have close Puerto Rican friends and I have close queer friends, but...

Devin: See I have this weird inkling in the back of my head that when I'm hanging out with other mixed people, or racially ambiguous people, or light people of color – I'm not saying they're queer, but I could almost apply queer theory to it, to the conversations that we have. There's a level of understanding where you're just like, "Oh! None of these structures make sense." Because you're seeing two different worlds, you're not invited into whatever community – the white community or whatever other community you're taking part in – and so you sort of see the faults in both of them.

Debbie: Yeah, because you exist in both spaces and in neither space a lot of the times.

Katy: Do you also reverse that? You said something earlier that made me almost think that you also reverse that and say that if someone is queer, they're easier to have a race conversation with? Even if they're white?

Devin: I hope that a lot and then -

Katy: That's not often the case.

Devin: Yeah. Or they think they can so then they way overstep their bounds. But I also think there's something there that a lot of gay, white people may not have come to terms with and that's why I'm so confused about why they're so bad at race. Because I'm like, do you understand how this operates? Because you're not allowed to be white. You know?

Even white gays, I’m like, you are on the edge of your own race inherently by being queer. So I think that they have a level of understanding, but they don’t.

Katy: I wanna talk more about this libido thing but I’m not sure what questions to frame it around.

Devin: So, I will say that when I was being socialized or coming out as gay and then later queer, I was able to use sex to do that, because I had one relationship to sex. But my relationship to sex is changing a lot. I’m starting to have this moment where I have a queer identity and it’s not necessarily based around sex. I still use that rhetoric sometimes, of sexual liberation. But now I have more and more asexual friends and more and more people who are like, “Yeah, I’m queer, but I don’t have sex all the time,” and gay liberation is so wrapped up in sexual liberation, so how do you use something that uses talk of fisting and BDSM and go to a pride parade – imagine an asexual going to a pride parade! So I’m interested in this conversation about asexuals and queer people with low libidos and you’re in spaces where people are using sex to codify themselves and to create a community. It’s weird because we’re always talking about queerness in this conversation, and “your level of queerness,” or whatever that means, and none of us actually think that you actually have to have sex –

Katy: To be queer.

Debbie: Right.

Devin: You don’t have to but I think that certain transgressive sexual experiences rapidly bring people to consciousness of queerness. So I think there is a shortcut there.

Katy: Queer sex is the shortcut.

[Laughter.]

Katy: Well, so, for me, the way that this plays in is my chronic illness. Because my adrenal glands are broken and the way that this changes the hormonal content of my body both lowers my libido and also means that naturally, without medication, my body produces levels of testosterone that are similar to yours, [Devin].

Devin: Oh. Okay.

Katy: Yeah, and levels of estrogen that are similar to yours. So I take estrogen and I take androgen blockers. So I’m on, like, MtF transition medication but I’m assigned female at birth.

Devin: Wait, so if you wanted to play around with your gender you could literally just –

Katy: I can’t.

Devin: So what happens when you walk into a room and there’s a hundred people, no fifty people that look like you and ten of us. Does it look like – for you, how do you experience it when you’re in a queer space where people are passing?

Katy: I mean I would say that what’s more common these days is that there’s a lot of spaces – because of the way that these fashion trends that originated in queer culture are being appropriated by people who don’t identify as queer – is that it’s more common to go into a space that looks queer that is absolutely not, and then you’re like, oh fuck, what’s going on, who are these people?

Devin: I’ve definitely been in spaces that mark themselves as queer that are mostly women and their boyfriends. And then I’m expected to feel like this is a queer space – and it is, it technically is, but then queerness or gender gets brought up and I’m like, I’m not talking about this. There’s nobody with – they don’t even need to have the same experience as me, I just feel like queerness relies upon a difference of experience. You know?

Katy: Right, it’s too homogeneous of a space. Debbie, is there other stuff that’s important for you to talk about, about your own experience, that hasn’t been covered yet in this conversation? Or different things that come up for you when you think about these things...?

Devin: Do you feel friction with these women who are able to speak on queerness? With this phenomenon, do you feel any friction, and what’s your relation to it being a woman, who’s dating a man, [and] who’s queer?

Debbie: I guess, one of the things that I struggle with, since I’m kind of on the border of all of these identities, is I don’t necessarily ever feel like I am in a position to speak for queer people who read as queer, who are in queer relationships or Latinos who look Latino who are always read as Latino and experience their life as a person of color. I know that I’m occupying this inbetween space and because I am there, I feel like I need to listen more than talk in a lot of those spaces. And I guess I would say that the thing that bothers me in those situations is, it’s not so much that I feel like their identities aren’t as valid but more like I feel like they need to listen.

Devin: Yeah. What’s interesting too is if we weren’t under the edge of this phenomenon, I would consider them just as much gatekeepers as me. Cause they do produce that other end, you know? You’re allowed to be queer and walk between Leah and this other person. But because there’s so many of them, it just feels overwhelming. And it’s a new phenomenon and I think we’re just also – any time a community expands, there’s friction. And that’s really complicated. Because we’re trying to make room for –

Debbie: I mean, I think everyone can benefit from listening. Even the queerest queer person probably is closed off in certain aspects of their perceptions.

Devin: Which, yeah, is totally me in this conversation.

to wherever they feel comfortable for their personal gender. So, you have two ends of it. We allow for you to not always have to be negotiating between male and female. We allow for butch and femme. Queen and masc, or whatever. We allow for these different interpolations of gender that are safe for you to step into. Our bodies allow for cultural reference points. Queens create things like shade that now all queer people use. That's what makes me upset.

Katy: That makes a lot of sense to me. I think whatever wall exists between me and understanding you is that I also feel like my experience of gender is a transgressive one because of what my body does –

Devin: Yeah, it is.

Katy: And that's not visible. And so that's why I feel so confused when we talk about this – I'm like I'm also having an experience that is akin to the one that you're talking about but nobody knows about it unless I walk around talking about it. But it does still affect me. But in a different way from your gender transgressions and Leah's gender transgressions affecting y'all. And so –

Devin: And it's lifelong, and it's –

Katy: Right, right, so, for me it feels complicated and it feels... like I'm walking in this space where I feel like I'm being shut out of this thing that you're describing but I'm not accepted into this other experience that you're defining as the other side.

Devin: But I feel like with you specifically I've always considered you queer. But I've also only known you in queer spaces and I've only known you as a person who creates queerness and creates queer spaces. So you are one of the bodies that I see – when I walk into the room if you're there I know it's a queer space.

Katy: Even though I read as a straight woman?

Debbie: Because you know her. I think what she's saying – and it kind of relates to my experience as a white passing person – is that you are saying all of these things and she identifies with a lot of the things that you're saying. So, obviously you're not talking about her, but it feels like you're talking about her because if there were ten of you, and nine of you didn't know her — so, okay, if there's a room full of queer people, what you're saying is the way that she would be read –

Katy: Right. You're saying, "This is what queer people look like."

Devin: Well, we're just important corners of –

Katy: Yeah, yeah. And I wouldn't dispute that. I would not dispute that.

Debbie: You could just stop taking –

Katy: No, I can't, because that's medically required – that's, like, medically indicated for me to be healthy. So I have no room to hormonally transition because I'm already on hormonal transition medication – I'm on HRT. But it's for medical reasons that are nonrelated to gender identity.

Debbie: So there wouldn't be a way – not that you want to – but there wouldn't be a way for you to transition [with hormones] without severely affecting your health?

Katy: Yes. Correct, exactly. So, it's interesting because for me – this came up when Ursula and I were talking to each other – I experience my body as a queer body because of the way that it produces these hormones that are sort of contraindicated for my assigned sex, but it's an invisible queerness – I'm like, I'm queer and it doesn't really matter who I'm having sex with or not because there's this other stuff going on that sort of fucks up everything else that is "supposed" to be happening. So then when I take the HRT, it lowers my libido. So this thing that makes me feel intrinsically queer limits the extent to which I can have queer sex. Because I just don't feel like having sex that often.

Debbie: So mine is also medication induced - mine is an SSRI, and it's interesting because on the one hand, I miss the intimacy of having sex, because the chemicals that are released by your body – I don't remember which ones - they make you feel really close to your partner and that feeling after having sex of closeness, for me it's very important to keeping my relationship bonds, but I don't want to have sex. I have no interest in it. Sometimes it even gets to the extent where the idea of doing it grosses me out. But I miss that feeling, so I have tried to switch my medications up to try to get it back, but it's funny, because it's not for the sex, it's for the feeling –

Katy: It's for the oxytocin release that follows the sex.

Debbie: Yeah. One thing I'm not sure about in terms of asexual identity is I don't know that I feel like I'm an asexual person since the reason I don't have a libido is not me –

Katy: Not inherent, yeah –

Debbie: Yeah, but then it's like, as it is, I'm somebody who is on the lower end of the libido spectrum, but then SSRIs just fucking murders them. But then I've tried just going off of them, because they've affected my relationships so negatively in the past. And then most recently when it affected my relationship with Laura, it was cause she thought – and it wasn't something that I necessarily think she thought consciously – but she would feel very insecure because I would not be interested in having sex. So she felt that I was not actually attracted to her.

Katy: Do you feel like that ever extended into her questioning whether or not you were attracted to women?

Debbie: Um, actually, surprisingly with her, no. I did not feel like she was questioning my identity; I felt like she was more internalizing it and questioning her worth and her attractiveness.

Katy: So I guess one thing that sticks out to me as sort of an unanswered question – because, going back to what we were just talking about with libido and hormones and bodily experiences that might be invisible, like I feel like I am – this is a question directed at you, [Devin] – I feel like I am inherently queer in ways that are out of my control and often unseen by other people and that’s part of why it feels so loaded and sensitive for me, when I feel like there’s something that I have no control over that affects my life in a really intense way not being taken into account in this identity that is being questioned, or that I experience as being questioned. And so I wonder, with what you’re saying about Ypsi Pride and queer people acting as a mouthpiece for the queer community when they’re coming from a different positionality or a different series of experiences, but they also presumably have aspects of their life that you don’t know about. So I guess what I would ask, my question is, what do you need from people like that? Who identify as queer, who walk through the world with a different experience than you, who have other things that mark them as queer, maybe in ways that feel as intense as the harassment and bullying and violence that you experienced as a teenager.

Devin: What do I need from people? You know what – I don’t know how petty this is – but I talk a lot about centering certain people and blah blah blah, and I don’t even need to be centered, especially like – there are other people that need to be centered, definitely. I think, specifically butch women and effeminate men and then pretty much every trans person depending on their level of taking up a role of queerness – cause I’m not gonna mark every trans – maybe a trans woman just wants to go through and be straight, or wants to be queer but wants to be in the same camp with, like, the other femmes, you know? But, definitely gender transgressive people. I think that butch women and effeminate men are the gatekeepers of our community and of a lot of knowledge. And from a shamanistic –

Katy: It’s interesting that you say the ‘gatekeepers.’

Devin: Yeah! From a shamanistic perspective I think that we went through a process of something and uphold something that is not the totality of queerness but is an important marker. If we’re thinking of queerness as a circle, or – no – if we’re thinking of queerness as a more amorphous shape, we put down a stake to something very definitive that holds up the whole tent. Does that make sense?

Katy: I’m listening to you.

Devin: Ohhhh!

[Laughter.]

Katy: To find out if it makes sense!

Devin: Shade!

[Laughter.]

Devin: I like the figuration of, like, a circus tent. You need stakes. You need one definitive thing so that the rest of it, so the wind can just sort of allow the rest of it to become something. But without certain very solid sets of experiences and, I feel like we – well one, we’re just the stereotypes. And that can be important and you have to live with that. Living as a stereotype is a different experience than not. I realize, I don’t want to be centered. I almost want to be decentered but respected as... I don’t know. I feel like, and this is where my spirituality starts to intersect with queerness in a weird way, where I’m like, “We’re the fucking shamans!” We’re the ones – me and Leah need to talk about this. We have this very shared experience that’s almost identical.

Katy: And very concrete. That’s what you’re talking about when you’re talking about stakes – you’re talking about something very concrete. And it’s interesting, because when I talk to Leah about this she talks about people wanting to abolish gender and how that’s a big problem for her because she doesn’t want to abolish gender; gender’s very important to her identity as a butch woman and being able to claim that gender identity and perform that is important to her. So it’s interesting because you’re like, “We are the stakes!” And I’m like, what are the rest of us? Like we’re trying to blow the tent off and away. And you guys are like, “No, we’re the stakes, we are holding this tent *down*,” in some ways.

Devin: Well, you wouldn’t have a queer community, if it wasn’t for us, to step into. Within capitalism, within straight, white – I’m so sick of saying seventeen things, but yeah – this oppressive structure that we’re living in, this exhaustive, oppressive complex that we’re all under – there’s a space in it for queerness to manifest and grow and there’s like, a petri dish where all these ideas are happening, and it is outlined – demarcated – by our bodies. Not yours. That’s really hard. Think about when you walk into a space and you know it’s queer – how is that? It’s because me and her, well maybe not me even sometimes, because now I’m starting to perform this butchness. But back in the day, if you walked into a punk scene when I was wearing my little fucking skinny jeans, and you saw somebody like Debbie, you know it’s a queer space.

Katy: Right. That’s true.

Devin: That’s what I’m talking about. We, our bodies are literally –

Katy: Because you get read, because you have the visibility.

Devin: And we’re highly gender transgressive in one way or another. And we end up producing a lot of queer culture – when people who don’t pass as queer get into the queer community and they get the undercut, well the undercut haircut is just a different version of a lesbian style that butch women created. So in order for people who are less butch to find their place in queerness they just find a way to permutate butch lesbian stuff down